

LAUNCHING INTENTIONAL INTERGENERATIONAL
COMMUNITIES AS A PATHWAY FOR
MISSIONAL VITALITY

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ABSTRACT

LAUNCHING INTENTIONAL INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITIES AS A PATHWAY FOR MISSIONAL VITALITY

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The project context is Mishawaka First UMC in Indiana. The problem is that many older and younger adults do not know how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission. If older adults and younger adults participate together in an intentional learning community about the Fresh Expressions Journey, they will form more understanding relationships and be motivated to launch a Fresh Expression together. This project was conducted over seven weeks. Data was collected utilizing questionnaires, journaling, discussions, and interviews. Because adults participated in the learning community, they formed more understanding relationships and launched a Fresh Expression together.

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I am grateful for church members, constituents, and leaders, who have also advised and encouraged me along the way, seeing the value of, and often sharing my passion for, intergenerational mission and ministry. I am grateful for my current church home of First United Methodist Church of Mishawaka and so many in the Indiana United Methodist Conference, including Bishops Julius C. Trimble, Tracy S. Malone, and the

Cabinet as well as the Fresh Expressions Steering Team and the Conference's "Growing Young" work. I am particularly grateful to my current Conference Superintendent Rev. Dr. Marti Lundy and her PFG (Perfect First Gentlemen) Rev. Dr. Kent Lundy, and the incredible Office Manager and Events Coordinator at Mishawaka First Samantha Maidment. I am grateful also to the Arkansas United Methodist Conference that saw me through seminary and ordination before I eventually moved back home to Indiana. So many of you are like family, and Arkansas is like home, even while it is good to be back home.

I am most grateful for my family, Kelli, Cole, and Ollie who have encouraged and supported me and sacrificed so much in this life of mission and ministry. Thank you Mom (Tina Martin), Dad (Mike Suite), and my bonus-Mom (Maryvonne Suite) for giving me life, pointing me in the right direction, being my biggest encouragers, and knowing that I was called to serve God before I did. Thank you to my many brothers and sisters (aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, and grandparents, late and living). I have to get a calculator out every time someone asks how many siblings I have because we have never done the half-, step- thing. We are just family. I love you all.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving wife Kelli and our amazing children Cole and Ollie. You are the greatest gifts in my life and have sacrificed so much for me in this life full of adventures. My prayer is that this work on intergenerational mission and ministry will help make the Church into the loving, inclusive, open, and affirming body of Christ and family of God it is meant to be for all the people God loves, especially you. God may not pick favorites, but I certainly have. The three of you are my world. I love you there and back again.

ABBREVIATIONS

FX	Fresh Expressions
INUMC	Indiana United Methodist Conference
UMC	The United Methodist Church
FYI	Fuller Youth Institute
MTD	Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

—Habakkuk 2:2-3, NRSVue

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

—Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28), NRSVue

INTRODUCTION

While The United Methodist Church (UMC) is the largest mainline Protestant denomination, it is also declining, especially in the United States. One reason is that it is also an aging denomination. As persons belonging to older generations pass away, younger people (1) make up a proportionally smaller percentage of the church, (2) are largely absent altogether, and/or (3) are not taking the place of older generations. The Christian faith and the Church are not being effectively passed on to next generations because of insufficient intentional intergenerational mission and ministry. Chapter one details the Ministry Focus of this project and how the mission and ministry context converged with my personal and ministerial growth to identify the theme and general nature of the project as well as the important work of developing the problem statement and hypothesis. An overview of the foundational chapters is included below.

First, the problem this project addresses is that many older and younger adults do not know how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission. There is no shortage of information about this problem as well as the declining and aging state of the Church. Many do not know how to effectively bridge the generational gap. While often unspoken, generational cohorts often view each other with a fair level of suspicion and distrust: some may even feel threatened by one another. At the same time, there is a desire for this to change; the Church appears to understand the “why” of intergenerational ministry and missional vitality: (1) because young people

matter, and (2) so that the faith and the Church will be passed on to future generations. The Church does not understand the “how” of making intergenerational mission and ministry happen.

The hypothesis of this project is that if older and younger adults participate together in an intentional learning community about the Fresh Expressions Journey (FX Journey), then they will form more understanding relationships and be motivated to launch a Fresh Expression together. A Fresh Expression is a “new form of church that emerge[s] within contemporary cultures and engage[s] primarily with those who don’t ‘go to church.’”¹ The key research questions of the project are derived from the problem statement and hypothesis. (a) Why do many older and younger adults not know how to intentionally and effectively work together for mutual learning in mission and ministry? (b) If older and younger adults participate together in an intentional intergenerational learning community, specifically to learn about the FX Journey, in what ways will they form more understanding relationships and be motivated to launch a Fresh Expression?

This document includes chapters on my ministry focus and biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations that directly impact and inform this project, each elucidating and supporting integral concerns. The last chapter is an analysis of the project and subsequent research and a synthesis of the ministry, biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary conclusions into a single statement about the ways in which they undergird the project. Namely, an intergenerational missional ecclesiology must be central to the blended ecology of the established Church coupled with Fresh

¹ “What is a Fresh Expression?” Fresh Expressions, U.K., accessed August 15, 2023, <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/what-is-fx/>.

Expressions as evidenced and supported by (a) 1 Timothy 4:11-16; (b) Susanna Wesley; (c) missional ecclesiology as informed by Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Lesslie Newbigin; and (d) the theory of intergenerational dynamics in the workplace through a sociological perspective.

The through line of this foundational work, as it relates to the project, is a blended ecology model of Church towards intergenerational missional ecclesiology. The blended ecology, according to Michael Beck, “refers to Fresh Expressions of Church in symbiotic relationship with inherited forms of Church in a way that the combining of these attractional and missional modes blend to create a nascent form.”² The declining and aging established Church must foster intentional intergenerational relationships for learning, mission, and ministry, by launching Fresh Expressions together. While attractional models, like inviting young people to church have their place, the Church must also emphasize and increase its efforts to go out and be the Church with young people where they live, work, learn, play, and otherwise spend time. The Church must also create opportunities to gather with young people in their networks, neighborhoods, communities, and the world.

Biblical Foundation

Chapter two details the Biblical Foundation of this project, which is 1 Timothy 4:11–16. The Pastoral Epistles of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, were treatises passing on Church leadership to the next generation, and whether the author was Paul, or using

² Michael Adam Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches: Revitalizing the Church in the Blended Ecology* (Franklin: Seedbed Publishing, 2019), 18.

Paul pseudonymously at a later date, this was already happening. This passage and 1 Timothy as a whole, is a blend of pastoral instructions and personal encouragement to Timothy, Paul's young protégé and delegate to the Ephesian church. Specifically, Timothy's morality, character, and pastoral responsibilities are to "set the believers [of all ages] an example" (1 Tim. 4:12) despite his youth. Paul urges Timothy to "Let no one despise you for your youth" (1 Tim. 4:12),³ which directly addresses the problem and hypothesis as it relates to intergenerational mission and ministry. This is even more intriguing if pseudonymous because "Timothy" may represent someone specific or young Church leaders in general.

While there were certainly meetings in synagogues, the early Church was intrinsically missional and made up of Fresh Expressions, after a fashion, with new believers of all ages meeting in homes and other spaces long before any formal church buildings or institutions were established. The early Church dealt with the reverse of what the Church deals with today. The Church was growing instead of declining and had not yet become institutionalized as it has today. While the United States is decidedly post-Christian, the early Church existed in a pre-Christian ancient Near East.

Exegetically and theologically, Paul encourages Timothy to hold to sound doctrine (orthodoxy), sound living (orthopraxy), and sound emotion/affection (orthopathy) as they relate to sound relationships, or involving the head, heart, and hands. In a similar fashion, Doctor of Ministry projects seek to influence change in cognitive, behavioral, and/or affective domains—change in thinking and attitudes for this project. While holiness is centered on right doctrine, thinking, living, and feeling, it is also

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this document are from the ESV.

centered on right relationships (love of God and neighbor). As indicated by this foundational passage, relationships in the early Church were intergenerational, and we share these concerns with the early Church. As is often said, we must hold to the message that has not changed while the methods must change. Chapter two is a more in depth dialogue with 1 Timothy 4:11-16.

Historical Foundation

Chapter three details the Historical Foundation of this project, which is Susanna Wesley. While her sons John and Charles are known as the founders of the Methodist movement, Susanna was (1) a pioneer of intergenerational mission, ministry, learning, and relationships; (2) a forerunner of the blended ecology of Church and Fresh Expressions of Church; and (3) a forerunner of the Methodist movement itself that would follow with John and Charles. With three generations in view, Susanna’s youth in the Annesley household influenced how she raised, disciplined, and disciplined her children in their youth. While Michael Beck and Jorge Acevedo correctly contend that Susanna Wesley pioneered an early “Fresh Expression” in her kitchen,⁴ she also pioneered intergenerational ministry in a time when children were not really to be seen or heard.

Paul Chilcote and others identify Susanna’s impact as making her “worthy of the title Mother of Methodism because her pervasive influence is so clearly discernible when the accretions of myth and legend are stripped away.”⁵ There are again parallels between

⁴ Michael Beck and Jorge Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), Location 242, Kindle.

⁵ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 17.

the early Church and the early Methodist movement as well as parallels to the Biblical foundation of this project. Paul and Timothy planted new churches, just as John and Charles started new societies as early Fresh Expressions. Timothy was influenced by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (2 Tim 1:5), just as John and Charles and their siblings were influenced by their mother Susanna.

This familial connection has important implications for the declining established Church today in an increasingly secular culture. Susanna raised her children both within the Wesley household and the broader household of God, the Church. Today, the broader Church family has very limited and irregular amounts of time with children, youth, and young adults. Their families of origin have far more time with them proportionally. This makes intergenerational mission and ministry even more vital, since the Church must also connect with the generational dynamics of the family: children, parents, grandparents, and other family members. This is not to mention the important role the Church can and should play in broken homes and families.

The Church may never be as central to the community again as it was in previous centuries—at least not in the way it has been. At the same time, the Wesleys recognized the Church’s deep apathy and its need for revitalization in a culture that attended church primarily because it was expected of good citizens. In addition to aging and decline, the apathy of the Church of England is akin to the Church’s apathy today. Again, the Church today may also be able to identify with the early Church with its mixture of the Jewish establishment within the broader Gentile culture. While many people today are “nones” or even describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” there are opportunities to start fresh with those who have no Christian upbringing and lack the baggage that

sometimes comes with it. This is similar to the early Church where no one had a Christian upbringing yet. For the “dones” today, who do carry baggage and hurt from the Church, there is more challenging work to do. Chapter three explores more of these themes with Susanna Wesley.

Theological Foundation

Chapter four details the Theological Foundation of this project, which is missional ecclesiology. With the unfortunate realization that it has largely lost its missional edge, the Church began to lose ground when it became an established institution and more concerned with protecting itself than focusing on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) and the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–40). To gain various perspectives on missional ecclesiology across Church history, this chapter engages with (1) Martin Luther and the priesthood of all believers, (2) John Wesley and Christian perfection, and (3) Lesslie Newbigin’s extensive work as the “father” of our current understanding of a missional ecclesiology. Each of these have implications for intentional intergenerational mission and ministry.

The Wesleyan focus on Christian perfection, in particular, connects to the biblical foundation where Timothy was called to Christian perfection by focusing on sound doctrine (orthodoxy), sound living (orthopraxy), and sound emotion/affection (orthopathy) as these relate to sound relationships. The core of missional ecclesiology is a Church being made perfect in love of God and neighbor as they know, love, and follow Jesus in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and help others to do the same.

As Stephan Bevans and others note, the Church of God does not so much have a mission as the mission of God has a Church.⁶ Theologically, this is the Missio Dei or mission of God. A working definition for missional ecclesiology, based on this research, identifies the Church as a community of Spirit-enabled and disciple-making missionaries engaged in God's transformation of lives, communities and the world. Again, a blended ecology is key; Beck says that "an inherited congregation must recover the missional purpose for why they exist."⁷ While the UMC exists "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," there is a missing word in the mission statement. The UMC should add "to go" to our mission statement as we launch missional Fresh Expressions of Church where we live, work, learn, play, and spend time. Chapter four is a further exploration of missional ecclesiology as it relates to intergenerational mission and ministry.

Interdisciplinary Foundation

Chapter five details the Interdisciplinary Foundation of this project, which is the theory of intergenerational dynamics in the workplace in the broader sociological field. This fascinating and fruitful research has many corollaries for intergenerational dynamics in the Church. While there are generational differences in both spaces, there are also many reasons for it, in addition to factors of when persons were born. Finding common

⁶ Stephan Bevans, "The Mission Has a Church, the Mission Has Ministers," *Compass* 43 no. 3 (Spring 2009), 3, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/mission-has-church-ministers/docview/230016498/se-2>, accessed February 2023.

⁷ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 68.

ground, purpose, and effective leadership are key, leading towards more generational understanding, better relationships, and missional impact as in this project.

Haydn Shaw notes that “with five generations in the workplace and at home, sticking points are inevitable, but getting stuck is avoidable.” Better yet, “the same generational conflicts that get teams stuck can cause teams to stick together.”⁸ Since the vast majority of Christians are not clergy or in vocational ministry and work outside the Church, the blended ecology is in view again. Paul (and perhaps Timothy as his protégé?) was a tentmaker in addition to his missionary work. People spend most of their time in their first and second places—at home and at work or school. The third places are all the other places people gather like restaurants, parks, pubs, coffee shops, and even churches, where Christians really only spend a few hours a week or even monthly. There is limited time with people inside the church if Christians do not meet with them where they are outside the church. While Fresh Expressions can occur within the church and other third spaces, they also occur in first and second places like homes, schools, and workplaces.

To be clear, the purpose of intergenerational relationships are the relationships and not some other third thing. This is truer in the Church than it is in the workplace, since, in the workplace, there are employer/employee dynamics and power differentials. While the Church wants people to come to know, love, and follow Jesus, it must not build relationships as a bait and switch effort. Young people are especially attuned to this and see right through insincere motives. People are in different places spiritually, and that is okay. Followers of Christ remain in loving relationship with people who may not be

⁸ Shaw, *Sticking Points: How to Get 5 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart* (Carol Stream: Tyndale Momentum, 2020), 322.

interested in Jesus, and they trust the Spirit to move and work through them. Chapter five explores the connection between intergenerational dynamics in the workplace and the mission and ministry of the Church. Then chapter six will bring this research project together in a final analysis, reflection, summary of learnings, and overall synthesis.

Conclusion

Taken together, this foundational work presents a compelling argument and significant biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary support for the need of the established Church to intentionally become more intergenerational in mission and ministry in a blended ecology model. While many people are often skeptical, and even suspicious, about sharing leadership and learning across generational cohorts, these foundations have a vital impact on the critical need for the intentional intergenerational work of the Church as illustrated in this Doctor of Ministry research project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

My unique context and calling intersected to develop the focus and synergy of this project. Put another way, Frederick Buechner says, “The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”¹ My interests, gifts, and skills for mission and ministry connect to the needs of my context as lead pastor, as well as the broader related needs of the Indianan Conference of the UMC in my roles as coach and consultant. This connection formed the basis for this project, the general nature and content of the project, the problem statement, the hypothesis, and the plan outlined here to test the hypothesis and implement the project.

Context

The context for the project was Mishawaka First United Methodist Church (Mishawaka First) in Mishawaka, Indiana. The church is located in a region of northern Indiana and southwest Michigan often referred to as “Michiana” due to its location east of Lake Michigan and a certain cultural blend of Indiana and Michigan. Mishawaka is in the middle of this region, and Mishawka First is part of the historic downtown.

¹ Rory Noland, *The Heart of the Artist: A Character-Building Guide for You and Your Ministry Team* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021).

Mishawaka First is no stranger to the decline and aging of the UMC as a whole. This wonderful church is made up largely of “chronologically gifted” individuals, a moniker they wear with pride, which I define as aging persons in aging congregations with great potential to make a difference in mission and ministry. In short, God is not finished with Mishawaka First, just as God is not finished with anyone. Additionally, Mishawaka First had an excellent preschool program at the time of this project which the church was working to integrate more intentionally with the church as a whole. Therefore, the target demographic for the project included preschool families and other young families with children as well as context associates and others from Mishawaka First. A review of the needs of the UMC as a whole, and Mishawaka First in particular, focused on information and findings that influenced the development of the topic, problem statement, hypothesis, and testing of the hypothesis in the project design.

While the UMC is the largest mainline Protestant denomination, as noted previously, it is also declining, especially in the United States. The UMC was formed in 1968 as a merger of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, and it has been in decline ever since. In 1968, membership in the United States was 10.6 million. By 1990, that number had already declined by 17.8% to 9.5 million. By 2010, membership in the U.S. had declined by 32.2% to 7.6 million,² and by 2018 it had declined by a total of 37.5% to 6.6 million.³ While there are numerous and complicated reasons for decline, several factors, including division and subsequent disaffiliations of

² “United Methodist Statistics,” The United Methodist Church: General Commission on Archives and History, accessed April 21, 2022, <http://www.gcah.org/history/united-methodist-membership-statistics>.

³ “2017-2018 UMC Local Church Statistics (US),” The United Methodist Church: General Council on Finance and Administration, accessed April 2022, <https://www.gcfa.org/media/2134/2018statssummary-with-2017comparison.pdf>.

churches around issues of human sexuality and gender identity, have contributed to the most recent trends toward decline. In other words, there are quite literally fewer UMCs and United Methodist Christians than there were even five years ago.

While remaining UMC, Mishawaka First echoes these trends towards decline. According to membership records, active membership is currently 303, with 186 members and 117 constituents. As the church seeks to embrace technology and digital community, like many churches did during the pandemic, the church has adjusted the way attendance is tracked to include online engagement. Mishawaka First, which had television and radio broadcasts in the past, did not have an online worship presence until 2020, when the pandemic pushed them to pivot and develop one almost overnight. Therefore, weekly worship attendance currently averages 263 with more online (170) than in-person (93) participants. While new people are participating online, other previously regular attenders have still not returned fully to in-person worship and events. These numbers are down even from 2021, when the church had a membership of 327 and an average worship attendance of 117 in-person and 170 online, or 287 total. The decline over the last ten years has been gradual and steady, from 469 members and an average of 330 in worship attendance in 2011 to 303 members and an average of 263 in worship (in-person and online) today.

As is also the case with many churches, in-person attendance is down compared to pre-pandemic attendance. While COVID-19 exacerbated the issue, Mishawaka First has been declining steadily for many years, much like the denomination as a whole. There have been only two new confessions of faith, three baptisms, and five new members in the last two years. For the most part, Mishawaka First looks like its

neighborhood, but a representation of younger generations and some level of ethnic diversity, as compared to the wider population, are lacking. Regarding ethnic diversity nationwide, the U.S. will no longer be a majority white country by 2044 when the nonwhite population will be more than 50%, up from 38% now.⁴ Currently, Michiana from east to west goes from rural and predominantly Caucasian in the east to a more diverse urban and suburban population moving west towards Chicago.

As a whole, not only is UMC membership in decline, it is aging. 62% of U.S. United Methodists are over the age of fifty, and those ages eighteen to twenty-nine account for fewer than 10% of its membership. The largest generational cohort of members is Baby Boomers at 38%, followed by Generation X at 24%. Younger and older Millennials make up just 13% of the membership. Even as those in older generations pass away, Silent and Greatest generation cohorts together still make up more than Millennials at 25%.⁵ While covered in more detail in chapter five, the five generations, according to Haydn Shaw, are (1) Traditionalists – born before 1945; (2) Baby Boomers – born 1946-1964; (3) Gen Xers – born 1965-1980; (4) Millennials – born 1981-1998; and (5) Gen Z – born 1999-2019.⁶ In addition to declining membership and worship attendance, and our current divide in the UMC, young adults make up a small portion of United Methodist churches, including Mishawaka First.

⁴ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2015), 23.

⁵ “Religious Landscape Study: Members of the United Methodist Church,” Pew Research Center, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/united-methodist-church/>.

⁶ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 9.

While churches may have good children and youth programs, according to Kara Powell and Chap Clark of Fuller Youth Institute (FYI), “40 to 50 percent of kids who graduate from a church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college.”⁷ Steve Argue makes a different assessment than his FYI colleagues. While young adults “may be attending church less, their reasons are rarely theological and don’t necessarily mean they’ve ‘lost their faith.’” Instead, “young adults leaving the Church may be less about protesting the Church and more a symptom of other priorities demanding their attention, crowding out their spiritual lives.”⁸ Barna Group suggests a higher attrition rate than Powell and Clark: “The most potent data regarding disengagement is that a majority of twentysomethings—61 percent of today’s young adults—had been churched at one point in their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged.”⁹ They may actually be among those described as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ Disengaged in church may or may not mean spiritual disengagement.

Barna Group President David Kinnaman suggests six reasons young Christians leave the Church: (1) churches seem overprotective, (2) teens’ and twentysomethings’ experience of Christianity is shallow, (3) churches come across as antagonistic to science, (4) Christians’ experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic or judgmental, (5)

⁷ Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Location 93, Kindle.

⁸ Steven Argue, *Young Adult Ministry Now: A Growing Young Guide*, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Youth Institute, 2022), 31.

⁹ “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years,” Barna Group, September 16, 2006, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>.

they wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity, and (6) the Church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.¹⁰ Following is a discussion of a few of these reasons.

Regarding a shallow experience of Christianity, one-quarter of young adults say that “faith is not relevant to my career or interests” (24%) or that “the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough” (23%) in church. One-fifth of young adults who attended church as teenagers say that “God seems missing from my experience of church.”¹¹ The religion of many young people, whether taught or caught, is most often described as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), and it is “supplanting Christianity as the dominant religion in churches today.”¹² Kenda Creasy Dean describes the guiding beliefs of MTD:

1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.¹³

Dean continues, “Today’s youth and young adults also are the most eclectic generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, technological tools, and sources of authority.” On the other hand, three out of ten (29%) of the young adults surveyed said, “Churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths,” and the same amount feel they are “forced to choose between their faith and [their] friends.” One-fifth (22%) of young adults with a Christian background shared, “Church is like a

¹⁰ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 91-97.

¹¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 116.

¹² Christian Smith and Melinda L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009), 171.

¹³ Kenda C. Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

country club, only for insiders.”¹⁴ Regarding young people’s perception of the exclusive nature of the Church, is it really just a perception? Mercy Oduyoye says, “The round table to which we are invited to participate in the Christ-event is one that opens the church to all the vulnerabilities of inclusiveness.” She calls for ever-expanding nature of that table.¹⁵ However, the Church often looks very exclusive, not even leaving room for questions and doubts, much less to be diverse and inclusive, according to many young people. They do not feel safe being able “to ask my most pressing life questions in church” (36%) and have “significant intellectual doubts about my faith” (23%).¹⁶ Meanwhile, the early Church, coming out of a Jewish context, permitted questions and doubts to be central to faith development. As a good rabbi would, Jesus almost never answered a question directly and often asked questions of his own instead.

Based on Barna’s research, Kinnaman wrote two companion resources. The first, *unChristian*, “looks at the reasons young non-Christians reject the Christian faith,” while the second, *You Lost Me*, “is about insiders...who have left the Church and sometimes the faith.”¹⁷ Kinnaman refers to three broad categories in *You Lost Me*, based on archetypes of faith in Scripture, to describe how young adults are being “lost” – nomads, prodigals, and exiles. “Nomads walk away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christian. Prodigals lose their faith, describing themselves as ‘no longer

¹⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 175.

¹⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “A Biblical Perspective on the Church” (Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians), *The Ecumenical Review* 53, no. 1 (Jan 2001): 46.

¹⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 188.

¹⁷ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11. The full title of these companion resources are (1) *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* and (2) *Why It Matters and You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith*.

Christian,”” and “Exiles are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and the Church.”¹⁸ These archetypes are more descriptive of younger generations and more helpful than “nones and dones” in an aging Church in decline.

According to MissionInsite reports, the average population of Mishawaka is aging slightly from the late thirties and is projected to move into the early forties,¹⁹ while Mishawaka First is more in line with the denomination as a whole, with 62% over the age of fifty. At the same time, Generation Z will become the largest population within the next ten years, overtaking Generation X and then Millennials. All other generations in the area will continue to decrease. This does not coincide with Mishawaka First and denominational trends; the average age of church members is increasing, while the average age of the population in its mission field is decreasing. This trend will eventually catch up as persons from older generations die, and it remains to be seen if churches like Mishawaka First will reach new generations or also die, or be forced to close their doors.

As noted previously, and like many similarly-sized churches, Mishawaka First has had strong children and youth programs in the past, including staff dedicated to these areas and a preschool. There is little evidence that Mishawaka First has had strong ministry with young adults in recent history. The youth ministry averages six to eight youth, attendance of families with children has been sporadic, and there are a handful of young adults. Many churches of various sizes in Indiana are experiencing this decline in age appropriate ministries, even churches that used to be known for these ministries. Mishawaka First experimented with consolidating the children, youth, and preschool

¹⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

¹⁹ MissionInsite by ACS Technologies, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://missioninsite.com/>.

director staff positions into one Family Ministry position. However, this only lasted one year, and I now lead the youth program and coordinate children's ministry volunteers, primarily just to cover the nursery and a time of "Children's Church" if children show up. Mishawaka First is also developing a ministry internship position to become a contextual learning environment for those experiencing a call to ministry.

"Young adults don't care about the Church's institutional survival," notes Argue. "They're facing real needs, loneliness, losing parents, and how to adapt [in a changing world]. With all this, perpetuating the system is not worth investing in. But if the Church's purpose connects with their longings, they see it as more worthwhile."²⁰ The goal is to reach young people and make disciples of Jesus Christ, not some other third thing, like keeping the doors open by attracting new givers. Taken a step further, building relationships is important whether or not young adults come to follow Christ or darken the doors of a church. Authenticity is important with this generation; they can see right through disingenuous motives.

The transient nature of young adults is also worth noting. It is not guaranteed that young adults will be part of Mishawaka First or other local congregations for very long. John Gramlich says, "Among all age categories, young adulthood tops the most frequent transitions in living arrangements, moving (on average) once every two years. Young adult ministry means that we're willing to invest in young adults as their in-motion lives intersect with our congregations, no matter how long they stay."²¹ Mishawaka First needs

²⁰ Argue, *Young Adult Ministry Now*, 28.

²¹ John Gramlich, "20 Striking Findings from 2020," *Pew Research Center*, December 11, 2020, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/12/11/20-striking-findings-from-2020/>

to invest in the young adults who grew up there, as well as young adults who have moved to the area for college, careers, and other life changes. They may have grown up in another local church or no church at all. As the Church seeks to grow in mission and ministry it must also grow younger by pursuing more intentional intergenerational mission and ministry in general and young adult mission and ministry in particular.

Ministry Journey

My story, unique skills, gifts, interests in mission and ministry, and educational and professional development, intersected with the context of Mishawaka First and informed the project, problem statement, and hypothesis. I am currently in my mid-forties and remember the year that I was at Annual Conference (the annual business meeting of UMCs in particular regions) when the Bishop wanted to recognize young adults participating in the Conference. He asked young adults, anyone 35 years old and under to stand. I was thirty-six at the time and was no longer a young adult. I was just an adult. When I was forty, I transitioned from youth to pastoral ministry as an associate pastor in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, which is largely a retirement community. People joked that church youth groups in “the Village” were made up of anyone under sixty. One member of the church affectionately referred to me as their “young whippersnapper associate pastor.” Presently, I am now the youngest lead pastor to be appointed to Mishawaka First in quite some time.

As I approach the years when midlife crises typically occur, I am having a good crisis of faith and calling. In Luke 15:11–32, Jesus tells the parable of a man that had two sons. Both sons are lost in different ways. The elder son is angry because of his father’s

wasteful extravagance towards his younger brother. In response, the father says, “You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (15:31). The younger son had wasted his inheritance on foolish living and nearly died during a famine in the land.

The father also says, “It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:32). As I move into the next part of my life and ministry, I have become increasingly burdened for the lost, hurting, and least of these; those who have been marginalized or hurt by Church; and the nomads, prodigals, and exiles, as Kinnaman calls them.²² The world is full of people who need a true elder brother like Jesus who sees them like Jesus does, as beloved children of God with great value. More personally, as a literal elder brother, most of my relationships have been “at home,” or within the Church, for most of my life. William Temple is attributed as saying, “the Church exists primarily for the sake of those who are still outside it.”²³ I want to be more intentional about going outside the church’s four walls and guide the congregations I serve to do the same—the people of God going out to love the people God loves.

I chose the Fresh Expressions and Future Church cohort at United Theological Seminary for this very reason. Again, Beck and Acevedo describe a Fresh Expression as “a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of those who are not yet part of any church.”²⁴ At the same time, Fresh Expressions are new communities of faith that hinge on followers of Christ and existing congregations

²² Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

²³ Alan Guiana, “Letter from the Archbishop of the West Indies,” *Theology* 432, vol. 4 (June 1956): 240-243, <https://doi/10.1177/0040571X5605943205>

²⁴ Beck and Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions*, Location 304, Kindle.

determining to go outside the four walls of the church building. They are micro-churches or micro-communities in their own right. Leonardo Boff might call them “Base Church Communities”²⁵ as a new (old?) way of doing church. It is fascinating that what is innovative in the Church today is often a rediscovery of what was already happening in the early Church. Early Church leaders just did not call what they were doing “Fresh Expressions.”

Fresh Expressions have an intentional posture of mission where people live, work, learn, play, and spend time. Fresh Expressions are “[1] missional: birthed by the Spirit to reach not-yet-Christians; [2] contextual: seek to serve the context in an appropriate form to the people in it; [3] formational: focused on making disciples; [and 4] ecclesial: a full expression of the ‘church,’ not a stepping-stone to an inherited congregation.”²⁶ Elaine Heath explicitly connects the missional and contextual components, while the formational and ecclesial components are implied:

Established Churches that do survive and thrive in the future will do so because they figure out how to connect missionally in their own context, in ways that are non-coercive, and non-manipulative. They will connect through loving their neighbors well.²⁷

In other words, established Churches must launch missional, contextual, formational, and ecclesial Fresh Expressions to not only survive but thrive.

As a former youth minister, I continue to be passionate about connecting older and younger generations. One member of the leadership at Mishawaka First is excited

²⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

²⁶ Beck and Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions*, Location 304, Kindle.

²⁷ Elaine A. Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), Location 90, Kindle.

about our next chapters together because he thinks I have the potential to help them “become less chronologically mature,”²⁸ or younger and more intergenerational. An intergenerational church, according to Holly Allen and Christine Ross, is a church where regular, meaningful interactions happen between people of different generations.²⁹ By contrast, a multigenerational church is one in which people of different generations are present but separated by age groups with little to no meaningful interaction between them.³⁰ This kind of ministry is often described as siloed, and young people walk away from the Church because they never fully connected with the wider Church body across generations in the first place.

My young adult journey did not include this silo. Many adults took me seriously, listened to me, and challenged me to grow academically, creatively, and spiritually. In high school, I was heavily involved in performing arts and was often a leader as drum major of the marching band and president of the Thespian Society. My preaching and worship leadership, especially concerning music and creativity, reflect these influences in my mission and ministry today.

I spent some time questioning my faith and not really going to church anywhere during my first few years of college. Since my college was not far from home, I eventually started going back on Sundays to the church where I grew up because I believed that it would always be my church home. On one occasion, while preaching as a young adult, I mentioned how we need to open the doors and take the Church into the

²⁸ Member of Mishawaka First, interviewed by myself, Mishawaka, March 10, 2022.

²⁹ Holly C. Allen and Christine L. Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 19.

³⁰ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 19.

world. I was gently reprimanded by one of the adults who saw my burgeoning missional statement as an affront to what he often said: that we gather together in the church to shut the world and its influence out from those of us “in the truth.”

While I developed some theological and missional differences with them, this church helped form me spiritually. I thank them, my mother, and grandmother for encouraging my love of Scripture. I am deeply grateful for my grandmother who took us to church almost every Sunday after my parents were divorced. She also took us to an annual church retreat that we hosted in late spring and a Bible School every summer. I was part of a small but very intergenerational church that took their children, teenagers, and young adults seriously.

I was baptized at the annual retreat in a small lake when I was fourteen years old and began preaching and teaching soon after. I was becoming a leader as a teenager, and I appreciate how they encouraged me and other young people. Since they are a small “denomination” and do not employ pastors or staff, believing ministry is not something you should be paid for, I never really thought about ministry as a full time vocation and had no idea that this was the beginning of a calling.

After college, I appreciate having had several years in the secular workplace in retail and banking before finally answering a call to ministry as a vocation. In 2006, I started a ten year youth ministry journey before becoming a pastor in 2016. My educational journey through these years included extensive training through

TENTMAKERS,³¹ United Methodist Youth Ministry Certification, and the completion of a Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary.

While the initial call I experienced was to ordination as a pastor, I began to think I was called to be a lifelong youth minister and also considered college/young adult ministry. As such, during my first summer in ministry, I took youth to high school and junior high school camps. While I was only responsible for taking the high school group to camp, I also went to the junior high camp. The camp director was impressed that I volunteered to be there as a camp counselor with mostly college students. He said I could be directing that camp myself. This vote of confidence stuck with me as I grew in confidence and as a minister.

An opportunity opened for me to serve at a larger church in Port Charlotte, Florida. Just a year and four months into this new role, I was asked to resign because it was not a good fit. After a challenging year and a half of trying to make ends meet and deeply questioning my faith and calling, another door opened at a church in North Little Rock, Arkansas. It was a second chance to serve as a youth minister. Looking back, I am deeply appreciative of this difficult time in my young adult and early ministry years. God used this time to hone my calling and perseverance.

While in North Little Rock, I organized and led my first youth mission trips and eventually directed a summer mission camp called Ozark Mission Project (OMP) with youth and young adults from all over the state. I became the leader my friend said I could

³¹ <https://tentm.org>. “TENTMAKERS Christian leadership experiences are designed for followers of Jesus Christ who want to live their lives on mission and be part of transforming a culture.” The West Ohio Conference of the UMC partnered with TENTMAKERS, and the church I served as a youth minister sent me several weeks of phenomenal training during my first year in ministry.

be at that first junior high camp years ago. Among other District and Conference youth ministry leadership roles, OMP sticks with me as doing young adult ministry well because it relies on college staff to accomplish about ten camps all over Arkansas each summer. OMP does construction, including wheelchair ramps, painting, and yard work. Youth and young adults are mentored, and many discover a call to ministry themselves.

While I initially felt called to youth ministry, I began to see how it was more of a detour that influenced me to see how the Church needs to become more missional, intergenerational, and intentional about passing on the Church and the faith to the next generation. As such, after nearly four years in North Little Rock, I restarted my candidacy work towards ordination in the UMC and attended Local Pastor Licensing School, mostly for the experience and to be ready if an appointment became available. The church I served did not need another pastor, and I assumed I would gradually work through seminary courses as continuing education while serving in youth ministry.

Instead, the journey towards pastoral ministry and ordination began far sooner than I thought it would. An opportunity opened up for me to become a pastor in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas. One of the deans at the Local Pastor Licensing School, who was the pastor of that church, saw something special in me and quickly became a mentor. She and the leadership of the church were envisioning how they could create a ministry fellowship or contextual learning environment for those like me answering a call to ministry. I still cannot believe how it all happened. In many ways, it was like I went away to seminary without having to move away. I was allowed to make my seminary education one of my top priorities while making the transition and learning to be a pastor along the way. I was humbled to be part of this experience of training new pastors.

I was commissioned as a provisional elder in 2018 and ordained as an elder in full connection in 2021 in the Arkansas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Sadly, I was the youngest ordinand at forty-four years old. In the years since ordination, I quickly gained significant experience, from being appointed associate pastor at another church, to serving as senior pastor in my first solo appointment, to being appointed to an additional church and leading them into a two-point charge realignment, to moving back to Indiana to serve as a lead pastor with other full and part-time staff. I have grown tremendously both personally and professionally in nearly twenty years of ministry.

I have gifts and strengths in teaching and preaching, with an emphasis leaning towards teaching as a pastor. Embracing my gifts as a pastor ideally means learning to do the things I have been called to do while helping God call and equip others to do the things they have been called to do (Eph. 4:12–16). We are far better together as the body of Christ; a team approach is far more sustainable than lone ranger ministry. As such, I tend to get along with almost everyone and am deeply relational, even while being an extroverted introvert or, perhaps, an ambivert, who loves being with people but must recharge by taking time away. I have some expertise in adolescent spiritual development, thanks to my years in youth ministry, and I am deeply passionate about passing on the Church and the faith to the next generation by seeing the Church become more intentionally intergenerational.

Since our strengths are often connected to our growing edges, I have invested in learning mine. Learning about my Enneagram Type has proved extremely helpful to me. As a “Nine,” I am a peacemaker and bridge-builder. Therefore, I want people to figure out ways to get along and work together. I can often see all sides of an issue and want to

see everyone as God's beloved and created in God's image. However, people do not always get along, and I am also conflict-averse and a recovering people-pleaser. Since I know this about myself, I try to intentionally move toward the conflict rather than avoid it because I know conflict is often the grounds of new growth.

As I seek to better understand myself and the congregations I serve, I have found Michelle Morris' innovative work with Gospel Discipleship³² very helpful. She developed tools based on the four Gospels, which each indicate a certain discipleship type, especially based on the last words of Jesus in each. Mattheans tend to be action-driven disciples, Markans are Holy Spirit-centered disciples, Lukans are relationship-focused disciples, and Johannines are mentor-apprentice-nurtured disciples. This model is helpful for both individuals and congregations. It is probably not surprising that most Methodist churches are either Matthean or Lukan; action and relationships are central.

This has been very helpful to help me understand myself and my context. I am a tie between Markan and Lukan while Mishawaka First appears to be Matthean with a Lukan bent like many Methodists. I tend to want to follow where the Spirit leads and view ministry as extremely relational. It explains why my ministry can sometimes appear messy to others but with a deep care for people. Again, this is why we need each other. Markans need Mattheans who are more often action-oriented and attentive to detail. Lukans need Markans to not just stay in their comfortable groups. We all need Johannines to help us to follow Jesus the Great Teacher.

³² Michelle J. Morris, *Gospel Discipleship Participant Guide: 4 Pathways for Christian Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020).

Spiritually, I often describe myself as a wannabe contemplative. While I do not generally regret the past, I often think about how I would have done things differently if given the chance. I also struggle with worrying about the future. Out of this grows my desire to want to live more fully in this present moment and with those around me. While I find myself drawn to intellectual and academic pursuits like this Doctor of Ministry Program, I am equally drawn to the more meditative and contemplative practices of the Church. As a friend put it, I think I want to become more of a “Zen Methodist.” While I do not always succeed, I strive to be a non-anxious presence for others in my mission and ministry. There is much to worry about, especially regarding the future of the Church, but I maintain that there has never been a better time to be the Church. God is always doing new things, and this is exciting news in a world that needs Good News.

My story and experiences have included my spiritual growth and discovery of a call to ministry as a young adult, as well as deep questioning of my faith and calling. Also, as a former youth minister, my pastoral ministry was and continues to be influenced by relationships with youth and young adults. My pastoral ministry has also been flavored with a passion for intergenerational mission and ministry.

Developing the Synergy

Steven Covey defines synergy as how “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and is the heart and soul of effective communication. Otherwise, you end up with compromise, where 1 plus 1 equals 1.5, instead of 3 or 10 or 100.”³³ Synergy is best

³³ Covey, Steven, “Questions for Covey: Generational Synergy,” Training, June 2, 2008, accessed June 22, 2022. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A180364486/AONE?u=up11179&sid=oclc&xid=5646a8ba>.

understood through experience. I witnessed synergy during the implementation of my project as adults of all ages worked together on various experiences based on Fresh Expressions, the Fresh Expressions Journey (FX Journey), Messy Church, and Dinner Church principles as detailed in this project. This project, in addition to other life and career experiences, continue to cultivate a deep interest in the spiritual lives of young adults and intergenerational relationships in me.

The ministry model for this project centered on forming an intergenerational learning community experiencing the Fresh Expressions Journey, detailed below, in workshops and then launching a Fresh Expression together. Specifically, we wanted to launch a “Messy Church,” which is “church, but not as you know it” and is “a way of being church for all ages to join in experiencing fun and faith formative activities.”³⁴ Messy Churches are “found throughout the globe” and “based on the values of all ages together, celebration, hospitality, and centering ourselves in Christ.”³⁵ Again, there are plenty of reasons why the Church should pursue intergenerational missional vitality, while there is a knowledge gap about how to do so. Developed in the U.K., Michael Moynagh notes how “Messy Church” does this very thing. By “releasing lay people to become missional, to do mission in the church they loved rather than seeking opportunities elsewhere.” Furthermore, “it was allowing them to become proud of their

³⁴ “Welcome to Messy Church, USA,” Messy Church, USA, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://messychurchusa.org>.

³⁵ Messy Church, USA, “Welcome to Messy Church, USA.”

church rather than embarrassed by its missional shortcomings.”³⁶ This is a key benefit explored in this project for this particular context that will also work in other contexts.

“Messy Church” gatherings are usually centered on a simple meal around tables, community building, and themed activities for all ages. There is a misnomer that “Messy Church” is just for children and their families because of the fun activities that teach seem to be “for kids.” Having some training in the model, I have witnessed the beauty of adults rediscovering play. “Messy Church” is for all people and all ages and is intentionally missional intergenerational. It is called “Messy Church” to embrace how life and church are often messy and because it look nothing like a typical worship service. Christ-centered learning through games, crafts, activities, and storytelling from the Bible, especially the Jesus stories in the Gospels, make it church from the start. As with other worship services and activities, “Messy Church” gatherings often have timely themes.

This project happened during Lent 2024 and included workshops built on the FX Journey, which Mishawaka First has also adopted as its Loving-First Intentional Discipleship Pathway. As also noted earlier, Fresh Expressions are “new forms of church that emerge within contemporary cultures and engage primarily with those who don’t ‘go to church.’”³⁷ Relatedly, the Fresh Expressions Journey (Loving-First Pathway) is a six-part framework for pioneering new Fresh Expressions that is “underpinned by prayer, ongoing listening, and relationship with the wider church.”

The six parts often overlap and even stack up on each other; they are: (1) Listening, (2) Forming Relationships, (3) Building Community, (4) Exploring

³⁶ Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 76.

³⁷ Fresh Expressions, U.K., “What is a Fresh Expression?”

Discipleship, (5) Church Taking Shape, and then, helping new Christians to learn this for themselves, (6) Do It Again.³⁸ Following is a brief outline of the sessions and modules:

Week 1: Workshop #1 (February 18)

- Module 1: Pre-Project Questionnaires (15 minutes)
- Introducing the Fresh Expressions Journey (40 minutes)
- Module 2: Fresh Expressions—Listening (35 minutes)

Week 2: Introduce the Messy Church Model (February 25)

- Introducing the Messy Church Model (90 minutes)

Week 3: Workshop #2 (March 3)

- Module 3: Fresh Expressions—Forming Relationships (45 minutes)
- Module 4: Fresh Expressions—Building Community (45 minutes)

Week 4: Plan First Messy Church Gathering (March 10)

- Planning Messy Church Gathering (90 minutes)

Week 5: Workshop #3 (March 17)

- Module 5: Fresh Expressions—Exploring Discipleship (45 minutes)
- Module 6: Fresh Expressions—Church Taking Shape; Do It Again (45 minutes)

Week 6: First Messy Church Gathering (March 24)

- Post-Project Questionnaires; (90 minutes) Focused Individual Interviews (scheduled with participants)

Since Mishawaka First was working to integrate the preschool with the church as a whole, the target demographic included, but was not be limited to, Mishawaka First preschool families and other young families with children, singles of all ages, context associates, and other members of the Mishawaka First family. In addition to an open invitation, there was a unique opportunity to specifically invite preschool families and ask several of them to commit for at least the duration of the project, thereby immediately including them in the leadership and planning of the “Messy Church” gathering and Fresh Expressions workshops. Unfortunately, none of them were able to participate.

³⁸ Fresh Expressions, U.K., “The Fresh Expressions Journey.”

Relationships did develop and deepen among participants just by virtue of intentionally targeting persons for their participation and commitment. Having enough young adults working with my context associates and other older adults made up a sufficient and appropriately intergenerational sample size.

The expected result of this project was to shift participant thinking and attitudes through an intentional intergenerational learning experience that is also missional and intentionally intergenerational. Adults of all ages began to see how intergenerational relationships and missional vitality is not only possible but also critical to the present and future of the Church. Another desired result was for the “Messy Church” to continue after the project’s completion.

Conclusion

Revisiting the general nature and content of my project as described above, this elucidates how the problem statement was identified and expressed a working hypothesis for the project with desired outcomes to be measured. This chapter outlined a general plan of implementation for the project. The general nature and content of the project are for younger and older generations to build meaningful and lasting relationships by learning and launching mission together.

As Mark DeVries and Scott Pointer state, “One of the first adjustments must be to stop learning about young adults and actually build relationships with them.”³⁹ This is

³⁹ Mark DeVries and Scott Pointer, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry: Making It Work, Making It Last* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 34.

ironic to read in a book of this nature while conducting a project of this nature. This project seeks to learn about and build relationships with one another; it is a learn-by-doing model. This is also the case with, not only intergenerational relationships, but cross-cultural and multi-ethnic relationships. Oduyoye says, “the story of the Circle is that of an ‘I’ who become a ‘we,’” which “is not an objective story: it is being told by the very initiator of the Circle.”⁴⁰ While this project focuses on intentional intergenerational mission and ministry in general, a related project could be in relation to the cross-cultural and multi-ethnic work of the Church across generations.

As noted previously, the problem for the project is that many older and younger adults do not know how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission in the local church and the broader Church. The hypothesis is that if older adults and younger adults participate together in an intentional learning community about the Fresh Expressions Journey, they will form more understanding relationships and be motivated to launch a Fresh Expression together.

This project was conducted over eight weeks and was qualitative in nature, although research questions were framed to help be able to quantify the qualitative data. Data was collected by utilizing pre- and post- project surveys, focused group discussions, focused journaling assignments, and focused individual interviews in conjunction with the intentional learning community with a desire to launch a “Messy Church.”

Again, the desired result of this projects was that older and younger adults who participated in an intentional learning community would experience symbiotic relationships towards collaborative missional vitality. This would then create a shift in

⁴⁰ Oduyoye, “The Story of a Circle,” 97.

participant thinking and attitudes through experiences that were missional and intentionally intergenerational themselves. Adults of all ages began to see the importance of intergenerational relationships and mission vitality to the present and future of the Church. Additionally, the “Messy Church” is meant to outlast the project. Through this project, Mishawaka First will begin to grow younger and in maturity by reaching and working with young adults intergenerationally to make disciples of Jesus Christ of all ages for the transformation of the world.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

A favorite verse of those who have discovered the joys and challenges of working with young people in mission and ministry is: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). 1 Tim. 4:11-16 is the Biblical foundation for this Doctor of Ministry project. It directly addresses the problem, hypothesis, and implications for intergenerational mission and ministry. This exegesis includes a brief survey and contextual analysis of the passage, with historical, literary, rhetorical, and canonical considerations, which will be followed by detailed exegetical analysis, closing summary, and reflections as related to the project.

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.¹

¹ 1 Tim. 4:11-16.

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 4:11–16

Historical, Literary, and Rhetorical Contexts

The apostle Paul founded the church at Ephesus, located in western Asia Minor, where he visited during his missionary journeys around AD 52–55.² Timothy was a partner with Paul before becoming what Luke Johnson refers to as “Paul’s personal delegate to the Ephesian community,” deriving “his authority from that commission.”³ In their fascinating article on the implications of 1 Tim. 4:11–12 for Nigerian youth, Ituma, Peters, Ngele, and Agbo refer to Paul as “a source of motivation to his protégé Timothy. This motivation was towards being emboldened for a leadership position,”⁴ which was important for a young leader in the Church.

Paul wrote Ephesians when he was under house arrest in Rome in AD 60, according to Sharon Rusten, where he composed several epistles to the churches he had planted. She says that Paul wrote 1 Timothy after he was released, probably in 62,⁵ during which time Timothy assisted Paul in his missionary work. Both Timothy and Ephesus are featured in the book of Acts, especially in chapters sixteen through twenty.

² John Piper, “Chronology, New Testament,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1:448 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988).

³ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), Vol 35 A, 256.

⁴ E.A. Ituma, P.E. Peters, O.K. Ngele, O.K., and P.O. Agbo, “Nigerian youth, politics, and the demand for τολμηρήγεσία: A study on I Timothy 4:11–12,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4, (December 2021) 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.7099>

⁵ Sharon Rusten with E. Michael, *The Complete Book of When & Where in the Bible and throughout History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 92-94.

Timothy first appears when Paul comes to Derbe and Lystra. “A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was Greek” (Acts 16:1). According to Raymond Brown, Timothy lived in Lystra in southeast Asia Minor and was likely converted by Paul there.⁶ Timothy became a companion of Silas (Acts 17:14–15; 18:5), another of Paul’s companions, and is also mentioned in most of Paul’s letters to other churches.

While there has been much debate concerning Pauline authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles,⁷ since the debate has little bearing on this particular exegetical focus, Pauline authorships is subsumed here. Although, one worthwhile consideration of pseudonymous authorship is how Timothy could represent youth and young leaders in general. Another worthwhile consideration is that Paul’s influence was successfully passed to the next generation—discipleship in action. Paul’s first letter to Timothy is perhaps the most well-known of the three Pastoral Epistles, which include 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. They are so named because they were written to Paul’s delegates of the same names; Paul is also pastoral in his tone as he encourages and nurtures them as young pastors.

Following is a brief survey of the passage. Michael Gorman says, “1 Timothy is a charge to order the faith and life of the church in continuity with Paul during a period of

⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 237.

⁷ Johnson makes the argument that the Pastoral Epistles “are not three separate letters, but a single literary composition; they are not written by Paul, but by a follower after his death; they are not written for first-generation Christians but for a later time.” Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 14. This has some interesting implications for my passage and project since the author makes the case for passing on authority and sharing it with the next generation.

his absence.”⁸ Paul offers both pastoral and personal instructions to Timothy and sees him as his delegate or, more personally, as a “true son in the faith” (1:2).⁹ According to Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, “The personal life and the work of the church leader are closely related and cannot be separated from one another,” which means that this passage can also be characterized as general instruction on how a church leader is to behave with more specific instruction included.¹⁰ Good leadership in the Church must entail impeccable integrity.

These instructions from Paul to Timothy are largely centered on the imperative to intentionally “set the believers an example,” through his character and pastoral duties, to give no one opportunity to despise or look down on him because of his young age (4:12). There is clear emphasis on the relationship between young and old in the early Church. Immediately following this text, Timothy is also instructed to look to the wisdom of parents in the faith as well as treat younger men and women as siblings (5:1–2).

By setting an example, both in how he lives and how he leads out of his gifting, Timothy’s personal growth and commitment to sound doctrine and sound living will demonstrate to “the believers” (4:12) how they should live and will be a means for him to “save both [him]self and [his] hearers” (4:16b). Paul’s instructions show his concern for a

⁸ Michal J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 632; furthermore, “This was not to be a permanent appointment as ‘pastor,’ however, but a temporary supervisory role in Paul’s stead (4:13) for a church that had a number of regular leaders.” Instead, Timothy served as proxy for Paul.

⁹ See also 2 Tim 1:2.

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (International Critical Commentary, London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 558.

young leader in the early Church as he relates to both younger and older believers in his efforts to combat false teaching/teachers.

Overall, 1 Timothy is a blend of pastoral instructions and personal encouragement. Johnson confirms that “the dominant elements in the letter are...practical instructions within the context of moral exhortation.”¹¹ Paul’s encouragements to Timothy concern his morality, character, and responsibilities in the church and how each of these can set the believers an example. A proposed general outline of 1 Timothy is:

1. Greeting (1:1–2)
2. Dealing with False Teachers (1:3–20)
3. Instructions for Church Conduct (2:1–3:16)
4. Take Heed to Yourself as a Pastor (4:1–16)
5. Conduct towards Different Groups in the Church (5:1–6:2)
6. Sound Doctrine and Pastoral Duties (6:3–21a)
7. Closing (6:21b)¹²

Paul’s pastoral instructions to Timothy deal with the false teachings/teachers, which must have been threatening the early church, in contrast to the sound teaching of Paul and others. As Paul uses the Law to point to Christ (1:3–11), Timothy is instructed to counter false teaching with sound doctrine. According to Johnson:

The strength of these convictions is what made the polemical attack on the hypocrisy and corrupt morals of opposing teachers effective. The focus in this section of the letter on Timothy’s personal attitudes and actions is entirely consistent with the emphasis on moral character found in Paul’s other letters.¹³

Paul also urges Timothy to demonstrate proper conduct for Christians (4:11–5:25) and to uphold his qualifications for leadership in the church (3:1–13). Paul’s personal encouragement to Timothy includes his own example (1:12–20) and urging him to stand

¹¹ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 148.

¹² Adapted from Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 25.

¹³ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 255.

firm in the faith (6:11–21). Following is a more detailed exegesis of the passage. First is a formal analysis with considerations for the form, structure, and movement of the passage, then a more detailed analysis.

Form, Structure, and Movement

The literary genre of 1 Timothy is a personal New Testament “letter addressed to a specific individual or household rather than a church congregation.”¹⁴ Johnson suggests that 1 Timothy functions specifically as a “mandata principis letter: the commands legitimate the mission of the representative, and the personal exhortation creates an expectation among the people concerning the attitudes and actions of the emissary.” Also, Paul is not the model of behavior to his delegate, but Timothy is to be the model of behavior for the community.¹⁵ Although Paul’s example to Timothy is certainly in play, and he expects both Timothy and the Ephesians to take note of his expectations. When viewed as a whole, the structure of 1 Timothy is a chiastic A-B-A’ pattern.

- A Chapter 1: instructions and encouragement for Timothy regarding false teaching as contrasted with faithful ministry.
- B Chapters 2 and 3: discussion of proper Christian conduct with the “mystery of godliness” (3:16)—the appearance of Christ—being the fulcrum or pivot point.
- A’ Chapters 4–6: instructions and encouragement for Timothy, also related to combating false teaching with faith ministry and character.

For the sake of analysis, 4:11–16 is contained in the larger and final main section 4:1–6:21 that ends 1 Timothy. 1 Timothy 4:11–16 can be structurally divided as follows based on thematic shifts in these six verses:

¹⁴ Douglas Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Literary Types* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 255; see also Tit 2:7.

Command and teach these things (4:11):

- I. Set the believers an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (4:12)
- II. Devote yourself to the reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching (4:13)
- III. Do not neglect the gift you have (4:14)
- IV. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them (4:15)
- V. Keep a close watch on yourself and the teaching (4:16)

The movement in 4:11–16 is largely between Paul’s pastoral and personal instructions to Timothy, the latter of which also affect his leadership role in the church. Paul either ends the previous section or begins this passage with the instruction to “Command and teach these things” (v. 11). It is likely a bridge between the two sections.¹⁶ Howard Marshall and Philip Towner expand this notion and see the entire subsection serving as “a bridge between more specific units of church instruction,” believing that it is an “appeal to Timothy to be courageous, active, and diligent in the task of teaching, ignoring the disadvantage of youth, and relying on the power of the Spirit.”¹⁷ This passage is really a series of ten imperatives, which Marshall and Towner confirm is remarkable. “There is a significant stress on [Timothy] being an example to others, which indicates that the qualities expected in a church leader are to be encouraged.”¹⁸ By nature, imperatives are instructive and expectant; Paul expertly communicates his expectations and encourages Timothy.

¹⁶ See also the similarity with 1 Tim. 5:17: “Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.”

¹⁷ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 557; they also add that this “refers to what has been said already and makes it the object of transmission to the church,” 559.

¹⁸ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 557.

Detailed Analysis

Based on the movement through Paul’s instructions, a detailed analysis is essentially an examination of these ten imperatives or, “a set of general admonitions about exercising the ministry”:¹⁹ (1–2) “Command and teach these things” (v.11); (3) “Let no one despise you”; (4) “Set the believers an example” (v. 12); (5) “Devote yourself” (v. 13); (6) “Do not neglect the gift you have” (v. 14); (7–8) “Practice these things, immerse yourself in them” (v. 15); and (9–10) “Keep a close watch,” and “Persist in this” (v. 16). While these imperatives constitute one large list, other lists and pairs include: “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (v. 12), “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (v. 13), “on yourself and on the teaching,” and “yourself and your hearers” (v. 16).

Marshall and Towner argue that “it is evident that the concern [in this passage] is more with duties than with relationships and especially with [Timothy’s] example to the congregation,”²⁰ but this argument is off base. Relationships and duties are both significant in this passage and 1 Timothy as a whole. Theologically, the personal life and work of the church leader are both concerned with right doctrine/thinking (orthodoxy), right emotion/affections/heart (orthopathy/orthokardia), and right living/action (orthopraxy). Noel Woodbridge confirms this connection between life and theology,

¹⁹ Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 567.

²⁰ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 558.

which “are linked in praise (orthodoxy), action (orthopraxy), and passion (orthopathy).”²¹

Put another way, the head, heart, and hands connect to right relationships with God and neighbor—in the case of this project, between younger and older generations.

Regarding “Command and teach these things,” Robert Black and Ronald McClung say, “The confident proclaimer and the quiet persuader are one and the same.” Timothy must persuade the Ephesians to choose between “truths of the faith” and “the good teaching” Timothy followed or “the godless myths and old wives’ tales” of those who oppose Timothy.²² According to Knight, the admonition and instruction demanded by v. 11 “may evoke resistance and may raise questions and doubts, especially when the one commanding and teaching is [young].”²³ This connects the previous material more directly to the material that follows, especially 4:12, and the reason the believers may despise Timothy, as discussed below. According to Lea and Griffin, Paul wanted Timothy to speak with authority,²⁴ hence the military-like word “command.”

²¹ Noel B. Woodridge, “Living Theologically – Towards a Theology of Christian Practice in Terms of the Theological Triad of Orthodoxy, Orthopraxy, and Orthopathy as Portrayed in Isaiah 61:1–8: A Narrative Approach,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 2 (November 2010): 6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i2.807>.

²² Robert Black and Ronald McClung, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), 94.

²³ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1990), 205.

²⁴ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. Vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 137.

Set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (v. 12b)

Paul's next instructions to Timothy are central to this passage and include the negative imperative in conjunction with the positive imperative that follows: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but [do] set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (4:12). His age is not known for certain, but J.H. Bernard suggests that Timothy was around 30 (cp. 2 Tim. 2:22) and was young compared to Paul and "in respect of the duties which were incumbent on him, though not by any means a boy or immature."²⁵ Most scholars agree that Timothy was between thirty and forty years of age and that the reference to his youth is a relative term to older persons.

The first imperative implies that believers were actually despising or looking down on him because of his youth, but it also serves to bolster Timothy to take authority. It is possible this either had little to do with Timothy himself and more to do with how the culture and Church viewed youth and young leaders, or Timothy had some timidity. It may also be a combination of both. Again, this is one area where a pseudonymous interpretation broadens this to application beyond Timothy himself. For Ituma, Peters, Ngele, and Agbo, to read it this way, "we must refer to Timothy's character as assuming a typical rather than historical form," that 1 Timothy 4:12 "reflects common prejudices against youth."²⁶ In other words, this admonition not to let anyone despise him for his

²⁵ J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 70. Marshall and Towner concur that he was probably less than forty years old "to be accounted as 'young' at this point," but "the significant point is the way in which the church leader is young compared with the other members and hence his position needs to be asserted," Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 560.

²⁶ Ituma, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 3.

youth could apply just as easily to any young person in a similar position, hence the reason this is a favorite verse of young people and those who work with them.

This possibility is complicated by 4:11–16, and 1 (and 2) Timothy as a whole, since Paul and the council of elders seem to be passing apostolic authority to Timothy and a new generation of Christians. The apparent reluctance from older generations to accept younger leadership, necessitate Paul’s assertive approach here and in a similar passage where Paul offers an imperative to others on Timothy’s behalf, “When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace...” (1 Cor. 16:10–11a).

Marshall and Towner confirm that youth were in lower positions while the old were revered in ancient culture. “The appointment of younger people as missionaries and leaders led to friction in the early church.”²⁷ Johnson adds to this line that while Paul plans to come soon, he is concerned that both Corinth and Ephesus receive Timothy and show him respect.”²⁸ This emphasizes the reciprocity of how Timothy is to earn their respect, and they are to show him respect.

While it is important to note that Timothy really has no control over what others think, say, and do, he can influence them to think, speak, and act differently. His character, or how he lives in word and deed, is central to his responsibility as a pastor. Setting the believers an example by way of speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity is

²⁷ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 560. They also note the interesting interpretation that “for some commentators the author is using a fictitious epistolary situation (based on the picture of Timothy as a young man in 1 Cor 16:10ff) to deal with a widespread problem in the developing churches at a time when the elder system was being replaced by an episcopal system and authority based on ages was being replaced by authority based on appointment and position.”

²⁸ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 256. See also, Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 559.

something Timothy can control. Johnson also references this emphasis in 1 Cor. 16:10–11a. “Paul’s desire that Timothy approach the Corinthian community ‘without fear’ (aphobos) is echoed by Timothy’s possible cowardice (delia) in 2 Tim. 1:7.”²⁹ While cowardice may be too strong, Guthrie says that 1 Timothy may have been written to inspire Paul’s timid representative to be more assertive.³⁰ Johnson is correct to add that “the moral teacher was to present himself as a ‘model’ (typos) of the virtues” Paul calls him to profess.³¹ Marshall and Towner’s characterization is preferred:

Timothy has been told to give authoritative instruction to the church. But his position of comparative youth may make him reluctant to do so. The situation envisaged is one in which a younger person is to have authority in relation to older people, which would be against the custom of the time. Two points are made. On the one hand, he is not to be despised because of his youth. This should be understood as primarily an encouragement to Timothy not to be intimidated by other people, and secondarily as a word to the congregation not to show disdain towards him. On the other hand, he is to act in such a way as to be an example of godly living, with the implication that this will win him the respect of the other people who may be measuring him by human standards.³²

Perhaps this is as instructive to the Ephesians as it is to Timothy; according to Gorman, Timothy’s “life of faith, love, and general integrity...will demonstrate that sound teaching is independent of age.”³³ Bernard concurs that this advice to Timothy is a

²⁹ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 251. Ituma, Peters, Ngele, and Agbo also indicate “it would have been an act of cowardice for someone with so much power as Timothy,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 3. Furthermore, “Paul’s admonition towards boldness and bravery was not targeted just at dispelling fear and cowardice from Timothy but firstly, at admonishing him to not allow such traits as cowardice to creep into him,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 4. At the very least, “Timothy was possibly a diffident, timid young man. His timidity could hinder a bold assertion of Christian truth,” Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 137.

³⁰ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 14. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 110.

³¹ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 252.

³² Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 559.

³³ Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 569.

request, “not a command to the members of the church at Ephesus, though no doubt they would take note of it.”³⁴ The Ephesians are not to despise him, and he is not to permit them to, by virtue of his good example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. For Timothy to prevent them from despising his youth, according to John Wesley, he was to “be a pattern in word—public and private; in spirit—in your whole temper; in faith—when this is placed in the midst of several other Christian graces, it generally means a particular branch of it; fidelity or faithfulness.”³⁵ For Guthrie, these qualities are often deficient in youth, “yet for that reason they would stand out the more strikingly”³⁶ if Timothy intentionally stood firm in them.

There are two groupings of these virtues: (1) speech and action, followed by (2) love, faith, and purity. First, what Timothy says and does, his words and actions, go together. Secondly, love, faith, and purity concern Timothy’s character, which certainly should come through in his speech and conduct. Put another way by Marshall and Towner, “Five areas are listed covering both spheres of conduct and types of character. The first two cover the speech and conduct of the leader, while the latter three cover the qualities that he must show.”³⁷ Conduct and character are central for Christian leaders.

³⁴ Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 70; see also J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, (London: Continuum, 1963), 103: “though of course primarily meant as an encouragement to Timothy himself, was also intended to produce a salutary effect on the Ephesian congregation generally.”

³⁵ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Fourth American Edition, (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1818) 562.

³⁶ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 111.

³⁷ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 561; Bernard refers to these two spheres as “outward conduct” and “inward disposition.” They are “graces which may be said to cover respectively our duty to man, to God, and to ourselves,” Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 71.

Considering these two groupings, or spheres, in turn, speech may refer to counseling and spiritual conversations as well as Timothy's pastoral responsibilities to the public reading of Scripture, exhorting, and teaching. Marshall suggests that, while something more than casual conversation is meant here, it also has to do with how people conduct themselves in all conversations, as well as in exhortation.³⁸ Timothy's conduct, or behavior, is critical in his example (*typos*). To use old adages, actions speak louder than words, Timothy must practice what he preaches, and "more is caught than taught. Paul knows that leadership includes modeling the Christian life. Paul himself was a model (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9), and Timothy must be one too."³⁹ This is the reason, Paul can say "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

This connects to the second sphere where Timothy needs to speak and conduct himself with love, faith, and purity. In other words, he is to love and lead in a loving, faithful, and pure way. With regards to faith, Marshall and Towner indicate that "growth in basic Christian trust is meant, rather than trustworthiness or any special type of faith."⁴⁰ Being faithful is an accurate assessment here. According to H.K. Kim and C.J.H. Venter, this is "operational faith" or "faith in action."⁴¹ Johnson says,

³⁸ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 561.

³⁹ Black, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 95; see also Guthrie: "As a counterbalance to contempt Timothy is to live in and exemplary manner (for use of the same word *typos* for Paul's own ethical example, cf. Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9)," Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 111.

⁴⁰ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 561-562.

⁴¹ H.K. Kim, and C.J.H. Venter, "Preacher and Spirituality: Perspectives from the Pastoral Epistles," *In Die Skriflig* (32, no. 2): 176, Accessed June 25, 2022. doi:10.4102/ids.v32i2.1637.

We are not in the least surprised to find *pistis* [faith] and *agape* [love], for these attitudes are the “goal of the commandment” that Timothy is to proclaim (1:5). More startling is the inclusion of “purity” (*hagneia*), which in the moral literature is frequently narrowed to sexual purity, or chastity.⁴²

“Purity” requires special attention. Immediately after this passage, Paul also instructs Timothy to see older men as father figures, younger men as brothers, older women as mother figures, and younger women as sisters. He specifically adds “in all purity” regarding younger women (5:1–2), which may have implications for sexual purity or chastity with regards to sisters in the faith. While Marshall and Towner confirm that it could refer to cultic purity, specifically chastity, “it is more likely to refer to purity and integrity of motive.”⁴³ Paul’s second letter to Timothy indicates that it is more about having a pure heart before God: “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). Gorman notes that the emphasis “on the ordering of belief, behavior, and leadership” is because of the presence of the opposite in the early church and its leaders.⁴⁴ Timothy’s example is critical and even corresponds to the salvation of himself and his hearers.

Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching (v. 13)

Paul’s next imperative is connected directly to his plan to visit, as indicated by “Until I come,” and he also indicates a shift from personal encouragement and

⁴² Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 252.

⁴³ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 562; Bernard concurs: “It signifies *purity* of life and motive, and not merely *chastity*, which is only one outward manifestation,” Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 70.

⁴⁴ Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 634.

instructions regarding Timothy's character to more specific pastoral instructions.

According to Guthrie, "devote (prosechō) implies previous preparation in private"⁴⁵ with regards to the public aspects of reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching.

Bernard points out that these are the three main areas of the pastor's public duties,⁴⁶ while Black and McClung note that they all center on the word on the word of Scripture specifically, and all three "were borrowed from the Jewish synagogue."⁴⁷ If he were present, Paul would also be devoted to these things. This indicates both Paul's continued apostolic authority and the authority that has been imbued to Timothy.

Marshall and Towner confirm that despite his absence Paul's continued authority is implied, and it "reinforces the point that what Timothy is to do is what Paul himself would do, and therefore his teaching carries the authority of Paul whose representative he is."⁴⁸ Timothy is Paul's delegate who gives him authority, while God is the one that ultimately gives them both authority.

Taking each of these duties in turn, regarding the reading of Scripture, Johnson notes that it not so much that Paul is reminding Timothy to keep up his personal reading habits, than he is "enjoining him to 'devote himself' (prosechein, 1:4; 3:8; 4:1) to the public life of the community, beginning with the practice of reading within the

⁴⁵ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 111.

⁴⁶ Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 71; Marshall and Towner are also correct that this had to do with "what actually happens in church, whether carried out by him personally or [organized] by him," Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 562.

⁴⁷ Black, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 95; furthermore, "Reading scripture in public meant reading the Old Testament, which was the church's Bible in the apostolic age, and the writings of the apostles... Preaching has been identified with Christian worship since the church was born... Teaching is closely related to preaching," i.e. Jesus' 'sermon' on the Mount begins with, "His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them..." (Matt. 5:1–2, emphasis added).

⁴⁸ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 562.

ekklēsia.”⁴⁹ Marshall and Towner concur that this reference is not about private study but to public reading. “The reference may be to the reading of the law and the prophets, as in the synagogue,” which is likely based on Paul’s references to the law in 1 Timothy 1:8–11. It is also likely that “Paul’s letters were read in church meetings (1 Thess. 5:37; Col. 4:16; cf. Rev. 1:3).” They also note that the reference is less about performance skill and more about doing the task regularly.⁵⁰ The Law and the Prophets were the Scriptures at this time; the New Testament was still being written and yet to be canonized.

While Timothy and Paul were both devoted to publicly reading Scripture (see Acts 13:14b–16), this was a custom for Jesus as well (Luke 4:16). Jesus also used the Law and the Prophets teach, proclaim the Gospel, and point to his own identity (Luke 4:18–19; 21ff; see also Matt. 5:17). The public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching was the pattern Paul and Timothy followed as they followed in Jesus’ footsteps.

In addition to mentioning what Scripture existed at this time to be read publicly, it is also important to note that the only way many people were able to engage with Scripture was through public reading, exhortation, and teaching. Print media was, of course, not widely available, and illiteracy was prevalent. “Only a few would have had personal access to the text, or have been able to read it,” says Guthrie. For quite some time, “the scarcity of manuscripts would make the public reading of Scripture essential to the life of the church.”⁵¹ These factors made it more important to combat false teaching with sound doctrine.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 252.

⁵⁰ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 563.

⁵¹ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 111.

“Exhortation” is also translated “preaching” (RSV, NIV) and, according to Bernard, it corresponds to a modern sermon.⁵² Then Kelly says, “by exhortation is meant the exposition and application of Scripture which followed public reading,” in other words a sermon.⁵³ “From the way *parakalein* is used in the sense of ‘exhort’ in 1 Timothy (1:3; 2:1; 5:1; 6:2), it is likely that *paraklēsis* (used only here) also has that meaning, rather than ‘comfort’ (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:3; 7:4) or encourage,”⁵⁴ says Johnson. “If the reading is the public reading of Scripture in the *ekklēsia*, then exhortation probably refers to preaching in the same context.”⁵⁵ Marshall and Towner also concur that the reading of Scripture is the foundation for the “exhortation” or sermon, probably the exposition of Scripture. They also contend that ‘teaching’ may have been based on what was read, but it may have also been independent instruction, as in “the activity of teaching and doctrinal discussion.”⁵⁶ In the rabbinic tradition of questions, answers, and discussion, this project also centered on focused teaching and discussion.

Lea and Griffin note how preaching “includes moral instruction that appeals to the will,” while teaching “makes an appeal to the intellect and informs listeners about the truths of the Christian faith.”⁵⁷ For Kelly, “teaching signifies catechetical instruction in

⁵² Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 71.

⁵³ Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 252.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 252–253.

⁵⁶ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 563; see Rom 12:7.

⁵⁷ Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 138.

Christian doctrine.”⁵⁸ Timothy is to preach and teach sound doctrine to combat false teaching/teachers (see 1:3–7 and 6:2b–10), a theme in 2 Timothy as well:

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15–17).

While the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching are not all of Timothy’s pastoral responsibilities, duties like prayer and administering sacraments are not included. In the context, it follows that the false teaching/teachers that Paul emphasizes are centered on proper use of Scripture instead of its misuse. “They are by no means all that would be done in a meeting,” confirm Marshall and Towner. “Rather they are activities based on the use of Scripture. This makes it less significant that the list of Timothy’s duties contains no reference to the sacraments,”⁵⁹ which may be implied based on the early Church’s devotion “to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayer” (Acts 2:42) in synagogues and from house to house (2:46).

Do not neglect the gift you have (v. 14a)

Paul’s next imperative to Timothy is to not neglect his gift, which is presumably a spiritual gift. While the identity of his gift is not stated, based on the immediate context, it may be connected to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching; it may also be leadership, based on the context of 1 Timothy as a whole. “The tasks just listed

⁵⁸ Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

⁵⁹ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 563.

are ‘charismatic’ activities, as in Rom. 12:6–8,” Marshall and Towner say in support. “It follows that Timothy needs the aid of the Spirit to do them.”⁶⁰ Then Black and McClung contend that Paul is referring to Timothy’s ministry of the word.⁶¹ This is the right assessment based on what Paul is encouraging Timothy to focus on.

However, by nature of what follows, “which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you (v. 14b),” the gift is more likely apostleship, as represented by the laying on of hands, as in commissioning or ordination. This certainly qualifies Timothy’s gift by explaining how he received it. According to Johnson, “charisma came to Timothy ‘through prophecy’ (*dia prophētias*),” and the setting was the council of elders in the Ephesian church.⁶² Dibelius, Martin, and Conzelmann support this too, “This is a significant reference to Timothy’s dignity. Ordination has the status of a sacramental act, in which not only the apostolic tradition, but also the grace of the office is transferred.”⁶³ Timothy may be Paul’s delegate and an apostle in his own right.

“The combination of the ritual imposition of hands with prophetic speech clearly suggests some sort of appointment or authorization,” concludes Johnson, “through the leadership of the Ephesian community itself,”⁶⁴ while Dibelius, Martin, and Conzelmann

⁶⁰ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 564.

⁶¹ Black, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 97.

⁶² Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 256, 253; see also Acts 6:6; 8:17; 13:3; 19:6, especially the similar commission of Saul and Barnabas: “While they were they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2–3, RSV).

⁶³ Dibelius, Martin, and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastor Epistles: A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, 70, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 70.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 253, 256; furthermore: “For the laying on of hands as a gesture symbolizing the transfer of power, see Exod 29:10; Lev. 1:4; 4:15; 16:21; Num 8:10; 27:18–23; Deut 34:9; Acts 6:6; 13:3.”

add that “Timothy had been consecrated to his office, which gives him authority over several congregations by the laying on of hands.”⁶⁵ Most commentators agree that this is an ordination or commissioning. Paul further encourages Timothy in his gift in his second letter to him, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:6–7).

Does Timothy’s authority, then, come from Paul or the elders? Johnson rightly concludes that it probably derives from both. They “serve to ratify Paul’s delegation and confirm the local leader’s approval of the leadership that Timothy is to exercise...”⁶⁶ Of course, it is really the Holy Spirit giving authority, guidance, and gifts for leadership as Lea and Griffin concur, “The Holy Spirit, not merely a group of elders, was the source of the gift.” They note that the laying on of hands was really an affirmation and reminder to all of his gift.⁶⁷ This connects back to the central imperative of 4:12; Johnson says it is,

Not to let anyone hold his youthfulness in contempt. His authority is real, and he is to assert it. At the same time, Paul reminds him that the *presbyterion*’s [council of elder’s] support for his work is important. He should proceed with care. And his challenge to the elements of corruption within this church’s leadership will have credibility only if his own virtue is unblemished and his moral progress is visible to all.⁶⁸

Timothy has challenging work to do. Therefore, Paul’s next instructions provide more encouragement and support to reinforce the previous imperatives.

⁶⁵ Dibelius, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 71.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 257.

⁶⁷ Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 139.

⁶⁸ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 257.

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them (v. 15a)

Timothy is to practice the things Paul has instructed him to do and not just treat them as hypothetical ideals. Practice implies repetition and improvement towards the progress noted, while immersion paints an image of being submerged under water, perhaps a view of Baptism. Guthrie beautifully says, “The mind is to be as immersed in these pursuits as the body in the air that it breathes.”⁶⁹ Lea and Griffin boldly assert that, “Timothy could either think hard about Paul’s directives or zealously do them.” Paul wants Timothy to ponder his directives and also eagerly do them.⁷⁰ He is to be deeply invested and committed to them. John Wesley prefers to translate this as “meditate on these things.” Further, “True meditation is no other than faith, hope, love, [and] joy melted down together, as it were, by the fire of God’s Holy Spirit,”⁷¹ which moves one to action. Again, it is really the Holy Spirit that is doing the gifting and giving the authority.

“The writer thus returns to the qualities and activities required from Timothy,” say Marshall and Towner, and “total commitment to the work is required” so that Timothy’s progress will be seen by the congregation (4:12). While human effort is stressed, “progress is ultimately the gift of God. Here the reference is to Timothy’s development...in Christian character and effective ministry.”⁷² This is an important distinction as is the cooperative nature between the gift of God and humanity. “If

⁶⁹ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 112.

⁷⁰ Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 140.

⁷¹ Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 562.

⁷² Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 570.

Timothy obeyed Paul’s advice,” contend Lea and Griffin, the Ephesians “would not see him as an inexperienced youth but as a growing man of God.”⁷³ Guthrie adds that, “The Christian minister’s progress as on a journey is under public observation.” What is to impress others “is his true Christian development, and not some lesser things such as brilliance of exposition or attractiveness of personality.”⁷⁴ While charism and charisma are key players, character is promoted first and far more important. Paul says that spiritual gifts are nothing but noise without love (1 Cor. 13).

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching (v. 16a)

Paul’s last imperative marks a return to Timothy’s conduct and character and continues with Timothy’s duty to guard sound doctrine, in direct opposition to the doctrinal shift that had already begun to occur. Marshall and Towner say that, “the final command is a reiteration of the need to attend closely to his own spiritual progress and to the character of his leadership, here summed up in terms of teaching.”⁷⁵ “The person and the profession go together,” for Johnson. “A teacher must attend not only to the content of instruction, but to the fit between what is taught and what is lived.” Since Timothy is to remain steady in both, Paul’s focus in this section is both on Timothy’s “personal character and on the quality of his instruction.”⁷⁶ Kelly appropriately points out that

⁷³ Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 140.

⁷⁴ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 113.

⁷⁵ Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 571.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 254; see also Guthrie: “the teacher and his teaching are intimately linked,” 113.

“exclusive concentration on one or the other will be dangerous.”⁷⁷ Sound character without solid teaching, or corrupt character with sound doctrine, would only cause harm.

The end of this passage indicates significant desired results for these imperatives. “For by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (v. 16b).⁷⁸ Again, Timothy cannot control what others think, say, and do, but he can be an influence through his personal character and carrying out his pastoral responsibilities. He also does not actually do the saving; as Kim and Venter point out, Timothy’s exhortation is “to help hearers in the world to obtain salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, Johnson says, “The focus of Paul and his delegate is not on themselves, but on the integrity of their own behavior for the sake of others.” He points to 1 Cor. 9:22 where Paul speaks of his own practice concerning Jews and Gentiles, “I became all things to all people, in order that I might above all save [sōsō] some of them.”⁸⁰ Johnson correctly asserts,

Paul could not be plainer that God is savior of all. What can he mean, then, by saving oneself? Here we see the difference between theological discourse that may want to maintain a distinction between divine and human initiative, and moral discourse that always sees them together. The point is for Timothy to live as one whom God has called into the saved community; attention to himself and to the teaching of that community will enable him to grow in that identity and thus “save” himself.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 109.

⁷⁸ This may be an allusion to “But if you warn the wicked to turn away from his way, and he does not die from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul” (Ezek 33:9).

⁷⁹ Kim, *In Die Skriflig*, 166.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 255.

⁸¹ Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 254–255.

Black and McClung put it well, “The promise is based on a condition: if you do, you will. Paul’s implication is that if you do, God will. The God who is eager to save (2:4) will always do His part when we do ours.”⁸² It is in this sense that Paul says it even better to the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil. 2:12).

Again, right belief (orthodoxy), right living (orthopraxy), and right passion (orthopathy) in 1 Tim. 4:11–16 relate to right relationships with God and others. While right belief and right practice do not themselves save, Timothy’s right belief and right practice point to what does save, right relationship, as discussed in the summary and synthesis below.

Conclusion

This exegesis of 1 Tim. 4:11–16 included a brief survey and contextual analysis of the material, with historical, literary, rhetorical, and canonical considerations. Then, a significant portion of the exegesis focused on a detailed analysis of the passage as a Biblical foundation for this Doctor of Ministry work. The closing summary synthesizes how 1 Tim. 4:11–16 is foundational to the project problem, hypothesis, and project, before turning to some final reflections.

⁸² Black, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 99.

Synthesis

As a whole, 1 Timothy is a blend of pastoral instructions and personal encouragement. Paul encourages Timothy in his morality, character, and responsibilities, and how each of these can set the believers an example. Timothy is instructed to order the faith and life of the Ephesian church during Paul's absence. Paul offers both pastoral and personal instructions to Timothy and sees him as his delegate, protégé, or, more personally, as a "true son in the faith" (1:2). The person and the work of the pastor are intimately connected. Therefore, 1 Tim. 4:11–16 contains general instructions regarding Christian conduct for a church leader as well as more specific instructions on the specific church's leadership.

These instructions to Timothy are largely centered on Paul's imperative to intentionally "set the believers an example" through his character and pastoral duties to give no one opportunity to look down on him, or despise him, because he is young (4:12). This passage emphasizes the relationship between young and old. Timothy is also instructed to consider older men and women in the Church as fathers and mothers and to treat younger men and women like brothers and sisters (5:1–2).

Paul's instructions show his concern for a young Christian leader as he relates to both younger and older believers to combat false teaching/teachers. By setting an example to "the believers" (4:12) through how he lives and leads out of his gifting, Timothy's growth and commitment to sound doctrine and living will show them how they should live. The desired result is the means by which he will "save both [him]self

and [his] hearers” (4:16b), insofar as Timothy’s character, conduct, and leadership point to the grace of God who actually does the work of salvation.

An initial view on the meaning of 1 Tim. 4:11–16 has been confirmed and expanded in the exegetical work. This is characterized in terms of Timothy’s sound doctrine (orthodoxy) sound living (orthopraxy), and sound emotion/affection (orthopathy) as they relate to sound relationships—head, hands, and heart. Being justified through faith, or being in right relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is what saves. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Jesus could not disconnect love of God from love of neighbor: “You shall love the Lord your God... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37–40). Therefore, salvation also includes being in right relationship with others.

This passage has helped in a number of ways to develop a project aimed at intergenerational opportunities for growth, relationship building, and collaborative mission and ministry, built on Christ-centered and Biblical principles. As a somewhat young pastor myself, as compared to the average age of my “chronologically gifted” congregation, this project was designed to create a bridge between older and younger generations. Therefore, I am also called to “command and teach these things” (4:11), seek to “set the believers” in this context “an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12b). I am called to encourage young people to do the same and help older people not to despise them for their youth or me for my relative youth (4:12b). As was emphasized, it is not possible to make people do anything, but this project was designed to be an influence toward change and to “move the needle” in the right direction.

Like Timothy was left in charge until Paul returned to Ephesus, the Church is Christ's delegate in the world until he returns or until we return to God. Therefore, older Christians and leaders must also devote themselves, and encourage young Christians and leaders to devote themselves, "to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (4:13). They are also not to neglect the spiritual gift(s) that they have been given, which were confirmed in events like ordination and the laying on of hands (4:14). Followers of Christ must help both young and old discover their gifts, put them to use in service to God and neighbor, and to not neglect their gifts. Perhaps most important of all is the implication of "baton passing" in the laying on of hands as the Church passes itself, the faith, and authority from one generation to the next.

Whether licensed, commissioned, ordained, consecrated, or none of the above, all Christians are called by virtue of the Great Commission to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). All Christians are called to "practice these things" and immerse themselves in them, so that all may see their progress (4:15) as they grow in Christ. This is by virtue of the same Christ who has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18) and gives the Church that authority as his delegates, protégés, and disciples. As with Timothy at Ephesus, pastors are to keep a close watch on themselves and their teaching. Persisting in this, God will save both the preachers and their hearers (4:16) as they partner with Jesus Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection: 1 Timothy 4:11–16

While the UMC is the largest mainline Protestant denomination, it is also declining and aging in the United States, as noted previously. Mishawaka First is no exception to these trends. While COVID-19 exacerbated the issue, Mishawaka First attendance has been declining and aging steadily for many years, mirroring denominational trends. Well over a majority of UMC congregation members and constituents are over the age of fifty with a much smaller percentage of young adults; Mishawaka First also parallels these trends closely.

While not the only factor in the declining Church, Kim and Venter connect it to preaching and, more specifically, preachers and their spirituality in connection to Timothy. Regarding preaching, it “is more than just recounting the story about the Word of God spoken by Jesus. In preaching this, the Word itself comes to the listeners. Preaching is the world of God coming to man.”⁸³ Regarding the preacher, Kim and Venter make a compelling case in connection to this project and concerning the decline and aging of the Church, especially in the United States. To summarize their argument, one of the contributing issues of Church decline is a decline in the quality of preaching and, more importantly, the spiritual life of the preacher and the examples they set in our congregations and communities. While “preaching is very closely related to the vitality of the church,” they argue that homiletics has focused “mostly on style, method, delivery, skills of preaching and hermeneutical methods,” while “to a large extent—neglect[ing]

⁸³ Kim, *In Die Skriflig*, 166.

the preacher himself.”⁸⁴ While preaching is far more than words from a pulpit, and our modes and methods must expand to become more innovative (i.e., sermonic conversations and discussions around tables), conduct and character are even more critical, just as it was for Timothy in the early first century Church.

This is why Kim and Venter read the Pastoral Epistles through the lens of the importance of a preacher’s spirituality to both their preaching and overall leadership as a pastor. Encouraging young leaders as well as “chronologically gifted” persons, must come from pastors and leaders keeping a close watch on their own spiritual life—to quite literally practice what they preach and teach. As with the implications mentioned above, leaders must also encourage others to keep a close watch on their own spiritual lives and what they contribute from that space. The consequences of pastors and leaders neglecting their own spiritual growth are significant. While learning that someone is a pastor should open the conversation, it more often shuts it down because of a lack of spiritual growth can leads to character flaws like a lack of integrity. These flaws can trigger people who have Church baggage, often due to Church and pastoral failings.

If pastors struggle with intergenerational relationships inside and outside the Church, then “chronologically gifted” persons also struggle and do not know how to engage with younger adults for mutual learning. This is why the project centered on learning about Fresh Expression and focusing on the needs of young adults and families in the Mishawaka First and broader community. The project helped older adults and younger adults to engage with one another in an intentional learning community to experience symbiotic relationships and collaborative mission and ministry.

⁸⁴ Kim, *In Die Skriflig*, 163; see their full argument in 161–164.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The historical foundation for this project is Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley and their siblings, and a mother figure in the early Methodist movement. Immediately following the Biblical foundation passage of this project, 1 Timothy 4:11-16, Paul instructs a young Timothy to look to his spiritual family, especially the “chronologically gifted,” for their wisdom: “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1–2). Who are the mother and father figures of the Christian faith in general and the Methodist/Wesleyan tradition in particular? If John and Charles are the founders of the Methodist movement, Susanna Wesley was not only their mother, but a spiritual mother of the Church and the Methodist movement.

Among other scholars, Paul Chilcote identifies Susanna as “worthy of the title Mother of Methodism because her pervasive influence is so clearly discernible when the accretions of myth and legend are stripped away.”¹ While “Susanna Wesley never preached a single sermon” and “never published a book or founded a church or mission,” according to Michelle DeRusha, she is much more than the mother of John and Charles

¹ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 17.

and the ‘Mother of Methodism.’ DeRusha correctly contends that, “Susanna Wesley serves as our spiritual mentor as well, a woman to emulate in our own modern-day lives.”² While people often talk about our forefathers in the faith, more attention should also be paid to our “foremothers.”

Susanna Wesley is an intriguing historical figure to engage with because her life, influence, and intentionality in raising and educating the Wesley children led, in many ways, directly to the Methodist movement. Regarding young adult and intergenerational mission and ministry, Methodism itself can be considered a young adult movement birthed in the Wesley home. Therefore, engaging with Susanna aids in the development of this project and directly addresses the problem and hypothesis as it relates to an intergenerational model of Church. She is an example of what intentionality looks like for “chronologically gifted” adults to engage in mission and ministry with younger adults.

This chapter is divided into three key sections that are roughly chronological. The first section concerns Susanna’s childhood and young adulthood. The second section is centered on her role in raising and educating the Wesley children. The third section examines Susanna’s ongoing influence on the Wesley children, especially John and Charles, as they moved into young adulthood, as well as her influence on the early Methodist movement.

² Michelle DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Heroines of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2014), 96–97.

Susanna Wesley

Susanna's Childhood

Susanna Annesley (Wesley), born in London on January 20, 1669, was the youngest child (of twenty-five) of Doctor Samuel Annesley. Kenneth Collins notes how she developed spiritual habits in a godly home that served her well. These habits included being a good steward of her time, meditating and spending time in self-reflection, observing the Sabbath, and likely keeping a journal to “chronicle the state of her soul before a holy and forgiving God.”³ In a letter she later wrote to her eldest son Samuel, “When I was in my father’s house … I used to allow myself as much time for recreation as I spent in private devotion.”⁴ While this shows how regimented she was, it also brings to mind the adage “all work and no play.” Susanna learned and followed strict discipline in spiritual practice and hard work, but she also practiced Sabbath rest and recreation as well.

Susanna was also deeply interested in learning and was self-taught in many ways. According to Richard Heitzenrater, she was “not university educated herself [since] women could not enroll at the universities.”⁵ Arnold Dallimore makes the bold and likely accurate assertion that she “possessed a theological knowledge superior to that of many

³ Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: a Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 14. See also Arnold A. Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 9.

⁴ Susanna Wesley and Charles Wallace, *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70.

⁵ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 27.

ministers of that day,” and perhaps today.⁶ Unfortunately, some of what she wrote was lost, but much of what has been preserved gives us a look into what she was reading and reflecting on spiritually and theologically.

Susanna would have benefited greatly from her father’s extensive library as well as his many associates that visited their home, Dallimore adds. “She undoubtedly read certain of the Reformers and the Puritans, difficult as their works would seem for a young girl to read.”⁷ Chilcote concurs that Susanna would have been “stimulated in her learning” through frequent encounters with Dr. Annesley’s colleagues and visiting scholars, one of whom was Samuel Wesley, her future husband.⁸ Both Susanna and Samuel Wesley were from Dissenting backgrounds, according to Heitzenrater. Susanna’s father was a well-known Nonconformist minister in London,⁹ according to Dallimore, from whom she would have “inherited gifts of a rich and unusual nature.”¹⁰

Susanna and Samuel Wesley were also both “coverts” from the Dissenting views of their parents to the Established Church, notes Heitzenrater, and “their change of loyalty was accompanied by a zeal for their new position” in support of the

⁶ Arnold A. Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley: The Mother of John and Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 13.

⁷ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 14–15.

⁸ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 17.

⁹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28; “In 1662 … Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity. It commanded all ministers to conform to the beliefs and practices of the Church of England. Some 2,000 refused to submit to this edict and, in what became known as the Great Ejection, these men, called nonconformists or Dissenter, were driven out from their positions in the universities, from their churches and from their parsonages. They were forbidden to preach, and were turned out with their wives and families, often to face homelessness and poverty.” Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 10.

¹⁰ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 12.

establishment.¹¹ Collins notes the positive influence of her background first, “Though Susanna would retain many elements of her Puritan heritage, she nevertheless decided ... to become a ... member of the Church of England” at almost thirteen.¹² In her own words written later:

And because I was educated among the Dissenters, and there was somewhat remarkable in my leaving [them] at so early an age, not being full [thirteen], I had drawn up an account of the whole transaction, under which head I had included the main of the controversy between them and the Established Church as far as it had come to my knowledge.¹³

Chilcote summarizes, “She drank deeply from the wells of English Nonconformity, [and] carried its revolutionary spirit into her own home in spite of her conversion to Anglicanism.”¹⁴ Her relationship with her parents was strained after that, even though they remained close, much like her marriage with Samuel Wesley would be.

Her youth is directly related to this project’s concern with young people. Dallimore notes, “Here was a girl displaying an independence of mind and strength of decision virtually unheard of in a child so young ... who gave promise of living a rich life and growing into a woman of remarkable force and character.”¹⁵ This gives us a view into her intellectual, spiritual, and emotional maturity at a young age. She made a decision for herself, likely knowing that this would cause pain in her family.

¹¹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28.

¹² Collins, *John Wesley*, 15.

¹³ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 71.

¹⁴ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 18.

¹⁵ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 16.

Susanna and Samuel Wesley wed in 1689 when she was nineteen and he was twenty-six.¹⁶ Samuel had several parish charges, and the couple had their first child before he was appointed to the now famous Epworth parish where he served for thirty-eight years. As they finally settled at Epworth, “the association of this town with the Wesley family was to establish its name in loving remembrance the world over for generations to come,”¹⁷ says Dallimore. Unfortunately, in 1764, the Wesleys “witnessed the entrance of death into their home.” Their second child, also named Susanna, became sick and died. Not too long after that, she lost her next two, twins, and her father died as well. Sadly, “Susanna was to face this grim experience over and over again, for nine of her [nineteen] children. Much of her adult life was taken up with bearing children and watching them die.”¹⁸ Her tenacity is to be deeply admired amidst such grief and loss. Among their surviving children, two of her sons, John and Charles, would “rise to great prominence in the founding of Methodism.”¹⁹ We can only hope that Susanna found joy in life as well, but she understandably seems to have struggled with her faith.

Susanna “said nothing as yet of conversion or the assurance of salvation,” Dallimore continues, “but she stressed the need for regular attendance at church and at communion,” and “she seems to have believed that by living a fully disciplined life and refraining from open evil they would be saved.”²⁰ While Charles and John recount an experience a few years before her death as her conversion, there is “evidence of a

¹⁶ DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 92.

¹⁷ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 40.

¹⁸ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 37–38.

¹⁹ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 9.

²⁰ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 63.

confusion in her mind as to how one becomes a Christian,” whether it be faith or “a reliance on human works.” Dallimore adds, “We can rejoice that she ultimately came into a full assurance of salvation through the experience her sons considered to be her conversion.”²¹ Many can relate to this lifelong struggle of faith and doubt.

In addition to so much death, strife, and struggling with faith, the Wesleys struggled in their marriage. Dallimore notes that “married life was not proving a great success from Susanna’s point of view. Not only was she not allowed a mind of her own,” although she certainly had one anyway, “they were also living in poverty, and her husband was constantly in debt.”²² While they also had their share of differences, according to Heitzenrater, “Samuel and Susanna held very similar theological and political views and were of a similar mind for the methods of raising their children.”²³ Despite many differences and even periods of estrangement, Samuel and Susanna were faithfully committed to one another in their own ways.

One exception to their often shared political views was a heated disagreement about King William. Collins says, “Samuel abandoned his wife and children and headed for London.”²⁴ When he finally returned and the couple reconciled, Heitzenrater points out the rather humorously that “within a year John Wesley was born, the ‘fruit of

²¹ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 9.

²² Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 35.

²³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 27.

²⁴ Collins, *John Wesley*, 16.

reconciliation,”²⁵ on June 17, 1703.²⁶ Their relationship remained partially estranged, according to Dallimore. “From this point onwards Susanna’s life was distinctly different ... Her existence became almost cloistered; she seldom left her house and devoted all of her time and strength to her children.”²⁷ DeRusha adds a hopeful note that, “despite their disagreements and stubbornness, Susanna and Samuel loved and respected one another, and Susanna was devoted to her husband in spite of his failings.”²⁸ In her own words, again to their eldest son Samuel, “Since I have taken my husband for better or worse, I’ll make my residence with him. Where he lives will I live and where he dies will I die and there will I be buried. God do so to me and more also, if ought but death part him and me.”²⁹ With notes of criticism Susanna also affirmed her faithful commitment to her husband despite their differences.

Raising and Educating the Wesley Children

“Susanna Wesley is traditionally given much of the credit for raising and nurturing her sons, Charles and John,” states Heitzenrater, “in such a fashion that the Methodist movement might seem a natural outgrowth of the devotional life and thought

²⁵ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 29-30.

²⁶ Collins, *John Wesley*, 16; see also notes on 271–272 where Collins includes extensive notes on the discrepancies of this date for John Wesley’s birth and his rationale for this date.

²⁷ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 58.

²⁸ DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 93.

²⁹ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 95.

of the Epworth rectory.”³⁰ Again, the moniker “Mother of the Methodism” is appropriate for Susanna. In her own words, she details her aim:

No one can, without renouncing the world in the most literal sense, observe my method, and there’s few (if any) that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hope to save the souls of their children … for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully or unsuccessfully managed.³¹

As was the case at the time, Susanna was responsible for the early education of the children, according to Heitzenrater. In addition to setting up a school in the Epworth rectory, she “instituted a weekly evening hour with each of the five or six children at home at any given time.”³² For about twenty years, Dallimore adds, she conducted classes six days a week, from nine to noon and then two to five with strict discipline. “There was no such thing as loud talking or playing allowed,” states Susanna, “but everyone was kept close to their business for the six hours of school,”³³ putting the discipline in discipleship.

“Susanna is often best remembered…for her hard-nosed approach,”³⁴ says Heitzenrater. In her own words, “In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them into an obedient temper.” She insisted this was important because “this is the only foundation for a religious education. When this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason of its

³⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 27.

³¹ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 367.

³² Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 27.

³³ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 372.

³⁴ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28.

parent[s], till its own understanding comes to maturity.”³⁵ Susanna also reported that “The children were always put into a regular method of living, in such things as they were capable of, from their birth: as in dressing and undressing, changing their linen, etc.”³⁶ This kind of discipline and adherence to her rule and method, according to Collins, meant almost all of the children “were taught to read when they were five years old; and a single day was allotted to the task of learning the alphabet.”³⁷ These basics are the core to further learning, including religious instruction and theological education.

Before judging her discipline too harshly, consider the time and culture. According to Dallimore, heartlessness and a lack of compassion were rampant and severe punishment, up to capital punishment, was prevalent. Undisciplined youth were considered a blight on their parents; so, by comparison, “Susanna’s discipline was light and constructive.”³⁸ They learned that disobedience would result in punishment, therefore, they learned obedience. They also learned not to repress but to control the expression of their feelings.³⁹ “As they were capable of” indicates that she believed a child should not be pushed past their natural ability.

While she was strict, Susanna was “an infinitely patient and gifted teacher.” She saw academic and religious education to be her most important responsibility as a

³⁵ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 370.

³⁶ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 369.

³⁷ Collins, *John Wesley*, 16.

³⁸ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 59.

³⁹ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 59.

mother. Even more, it was her personal ministry, and “their very souls were at stake.”⁴⁰

Christopher Ritter notes the impression this had on John Wesley:

John obviously considered his mother a pattern to be followed because, as an adult, he asked her to write a summary of the program of discipline and learning she employed in her home. Published under the title “The Way of Education,” reveals a rigorous and deliberate pattern of spiritual formation.⁴¹

Susanna was ahead of her time regarding women and girls. According to Heitzenrater, she was very concerned that “girls be taught to read as well as boys.” As a matter of fact, as John was growing up in the Epworth rectory, “he was the only boy at home with four or five sisters until he was four and his little brother Charles was born.”⁴² One of the household “by laws” stipulated “that no girl be taught to work till she can read very well, [since] putting the children to learn sewing before they can read perfectly is the very best reason why so few women can read fit to be heard, and never to be well understood.”⁴³ Susanna never wavered from these fundamental principles; Chilcote notes, “No one, including a woman, ought to be prohibited from doing God’s work.”⁴⁴

Of course, religious instruction was a large part of the Wesley family school. Each day began and ended with “the singing of a psalm and the reading of Scripture,” says Dallimore.⁴⁵ “All the children were given careful training in piety and learning,” notes Heitzenrater. More specifically, “they learned a traditional Anglican theology that

⁴⁰ DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 94–95.

⁴¹ Christopher Miles Ritter, *Seven Things John Wesley Expected Us to Do for Kids*. (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2016), location 372, Kindle.

⁴² Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28.

⁴³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28.

⁴⁴ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 18.

⁴⁵ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 62.

combined faith and good works in a fashion that reflected the orthodox doctrinal perspective and Puritan ethical inclinations of Samuel and Susanna.”⁴⁶ Dallimore adds that they were also taught basic Bible knowledge and application, especially to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”⁴⁷ The Wesley home school was also the Susanna seminary.

The Epworth rectory burned twice during Samuel’s tenure there. The first fire was in 1709,” according to Heitzenrater and “was the occasion on which John was saved by the neighbors forming a human ladder to pluck him out of his second-floor bedroom window.”⁴⁸ Hence the famous phrase borrowed from the prophet Zechariah, “plucked as a brand out of the fire” (7:32); the story has become legendary. Fittingly, Chilcote notes the special bond that existed between John and Susanna. “While all of her children received close and affectionate attention, her discernment of John’s special gifts and a heightened sense of destiny for this providentially preserved son eventually led to a unique resolution concerning him.”⁴⁹ In her own words, she said, “I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child that thou has mercifully provided for, than ever I have been, that I may endeavor to instill into his mind the principles of thy true religion and virtue.”⁵⁰ God’s providence for this child was in view.

⁴⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 33–34.

⁴⁷ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 62.

⁴⁸ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 29.

⁴⁹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 21.

⁵⁰ Susanna Wesley, *Methodist Studies Journal* (May 17, 1711); cf. citation of Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, 2 vols. (London: Kershaw, 1824-25), 1:112.

Susanna began “inviting neighbors to her kitchen for Sunday evening prayers in 1711–12,”⁵¹ notes Heitzenrater. This was due to her dissatisfaction with Mr. Inman, a curate Samuel brought in to help in the parish, according to Dallimore. Before too long, about 200 people were gathered in the crowded kitchen.⁵² “Psalms were sung, prayers were read, and a sermon drawn from Samuel’s library was recited by Susanna to the edification of all,” says Collins.⁵³ She continued this practice despite Samuel’s protest since, as Heitzenrater continues, “Such a gathering might appear to some as a worship service in a private home,” which was forbidden at the time, “as a threat to established religion and [was] perceived as an underground means of circumventing the registration laws for dissenters.”⁵⁴ Samuel wrote a strongly worded letter to his wife from London and received a strongly worded response from her:

If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly … send me your positive command, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall stand before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁵

Samuel said nothing more about it, according to Dallimore, and when he “returned home he found his own Sunday congregations much increased and a new measure of good will in the parish as a result of Susanna’s services.”⁵⁶ It is no wonder then that Samuel did not protest too much.

⁵¹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 31.

⁵² Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 81.

⁵³ Collins, *John Wesley: a Theological Journey*, 20.

⁵⁴ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 31–32.

⁵⁵ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 32; George Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family* (London: S.W. Partridge and Co.; New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1906), 197.

⁵⁶ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 81.

This is a case study of the “blended ecology” of church, which “refers to Fresh Expressions of church in symbiotic relationship with inherited forms of Church in a way that the combining of these attractional and missional modes blend to create a nascent form,” as noted previously according to Michael Beck.⁵⁷ There was clearly a symbiotic relationship between the early Fresh Expression Susanna led in the Epworth rectory kitchen and the inherited form of church Samuel led in the Epworth parish.

At around ten years old, each of the boys was sent to London for more formal schooling, “young Samuel and Charles to Westminster. John to Charterhouse,” notes Heitzenrater. “All three then followed their father’s footsteps to Oxford.”⁵⁸ Dallimore indicates that while the girls were not given the same opportunities as their brothers, since the conditions for young women were very different from today, they benefited “from their father’s learning, as well as from their mother’s daily instruction, together with her watchful admonition and her constant example.”⁵⁹ There was a definite boldness in Susanna during a time when women and girls certainly “had their place.” This must have influenced her daughters as much, if not more, than it did John and Charles and their attitudes towards women, especially in ministry.

Susanna’s Influence on the Wesley Family and Methodism

While the influence of Samuel’s weekly sermon “would certainly leave its mark on the developing theology of the children,” says Heitzenrater, “the surviving letters of

⁵⁷ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 18.

⁵⁸ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 34.

⁵⁹ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 101, 98.

Susanna to her children contain a preponderance of theological issues perhaps surprising to behold in an age when women were not expected to be well educated.”⁶⁰ According to George Stevenson, Susanna,

Felt so deeply the responsibility she had undertaken in educating her children that she followed up her home instruction by a series of letters, which to her sons were of priceless worth, and which in their own inherent excellence are as valuable now as they were to her sons.⁶¹

Patrick Oden notes that “We find in her letters, journals, and other writings that she was a serious, highly intellectual woman with strong, developed opinions which played a profound role in an age in which women were not given an equal voice with men.”⁶² Dallimore writes, “Susanna also wrote manuals for her children, and these she considered to be simplified handbooks on Christian doctrine. Most important of all, she wrote an exposition of the Apostles’ Creed.”⁶³ This is akin to the catechesis of the early Church and not unlike confirmation material.

In Samuel’s letters and effort to continue to educate his sons as well, he often praised Susanna. Dallimore correctly asserts that “she was more than worthy of the commendations he gave her and he very rightly desired that his children should never fail to show their love for her.”⁶⁴ The influence of John’s mother and the encouragement of his father to cherish her influence is not to be understated, although he seems to have

⁶⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 27.

⁶¹ Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family*, 175.

⁶² Patrick Oden, “‘Let Us Not Spend Our Time in Trifling’: Susanna Wesley, a Mother to Her Sons,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 48, no. 2 (2013), 117; see also Charles Wallace, Jr., “Susanna Wesley’s Spirituality: The Freedom of a Christian Woman,” *Methodist History* 22, no. 3 (1984), 158–173.

⁶³ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 95; see also her portrayal of the passion of Christ, 95–96.

⁶⁴ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 81.

inherited his father's struggle with relating to women. Heitzenrater humorously points out that John Wesley's "eagerness to accept the leadership of women [in early Methodism] is as understandable as his inability to develop a lasting intimate relationship with a woman is perplexing."⁶⁵ Dallimore is equally humorous on the matter; while Susanna instructed John on love, "there is little evidence of any effect of her words in his own life. His two love affairs—one with Sophia Hopkey and the other with Grace Murray—and his marriage were not exactly models of understanding!"⁶⁶ Nonetheless, according to Chilcote, "much of Wesley's early appreciation for women's gifts and the utilization of them in the life of the church can be traced to the influence of his mother."⁶⁷

Just as Susanna developed spiritual habits in her home growing up, so did John, who also took on the practice of keeping a journal like his mother. While John was referred to as "a man of one book,"⁶⁸ he also read anything else he could get his hands on. Oxford educated and ordained in the Church of England, he was very disciplined and self-taught in many ways like Susanna. In the context of parental discipline and encouraging self-discipline, Heitzenrater concurs that "she extended her own self-taught training to all her children."⁶⁹ Regarding her methods and discipline, this sounds a lot like the kind of discipline that would become Methodism.

⁶⁵ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28.

⁶⁶ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 95.

⁶⁷ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 24, 238.

⁶⁸ See William Melvin Arnett, "John Wesley: Man of One Book" (PhD diss., Drew University, Madison, 1954).

⁶⁹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 28.

Her bold character undoubtedly influenced her sons since, at this time, “a woman’s greatest accomplishment lay in the qualities she imparted to her offspring … by natural inheritance of mind, her strength of decision and her numerous other rare qualities.”⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, this influenced her sons to be part of the Established Church while also calling for its revival. Chilcote suggests that she inculcated this with “varying degrees of success in the minds of her children.”⁷¹ Her methods were apparently effective since “the Wesley children grew up to be men and women who showed great strength of character,” states Dallimore, John “to a degree superior to almost all others of his time. Susanna trained her children to obey and in so doing she richly molded their characters.”⁷² To learn discipline and to obey parents is to learn to obey God.

“Susanna also played an important and influential role when John was first considering the ministry,” according to DeRusha. “While Samuel desired that his son pursue further higher education, Susanna disagreed, urging John to become ordained as soon as possible.”⁷³ In her own words, “I think the sooner you are a deacon, the better,” and referred to higher education as “trifling studies.”⁷⁴ Samuel eventually came around; according to DeRusha John was ordained a deacon in 1725, “a decision that would dictate the course of his life,”⁷⁵ as John followed his mother’s advice.

⁷⁰ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 16.

⁷¹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 18.

⁷² Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 62.

⁷³ DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 96.

⁷⁴ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 106.

⁷⁵ DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 96.

Regarding theology and faith, it was noted earlier how John and Charles held that Susanna's conversion was just a few years before her death. On Dallimore's point that "she seems to have believed that by living a fully disciplined life and refraining from open evil they would be saved," John would flesh this out and correct it in his theology and experience. Nonetheless, "the strength of character which her children would display in later life was due in part, of course, to inherited qualities, but it also stemmed from their training in Susanna's Christian school"⁷⁶ since character begets character.

John's early influences, notes Heitzenrater, "led him to tie together the perfectionism of the Pietists, the moralism of the Puritans, and the devotionalism of the Mystics in a pragmatic approach that he felt could operate within the structure and doctrine of the Church of England."⁷⁷ Methodism began as a movement to reform the Church of England with evidence of Samuel and Susanna's influence. The Wesleyan revival arose, according to Chilcote, "as a renewal movement within the Church of England." John and Charles never intended to found a new denomination.⁷⁸ Perhaps the "conversion" of Susanna from nonconformity to the established Church, and accompanying theological shifts, later influenced John and Charles, bringing some Nonconformist-like tendencies to challenge the established Church. Early Methodism was not received as well by the establishment as it was by the spiritually hungry populace.

⁷⁶ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 63.

⁷⁷ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 34.

⁷⁸ Chilcote, *Her Own Story*, 18.

Many historians hold that Susanna’s “kitchen prayers” were the seeds of the early Methodist movement and even the current Fresh Expressions movement. Chilcote argues that they were early society meetings and that Susanna served as its pastor. They “bear a striking resemblance to the practices of sectarian women preachers in the previous century and prefigure later theological and practical developments within the Methodist societies as well.”⁷⁹ DeRusha even references how she referred to her kitchen congregation as “Our Society” and led them in a similar way to the Methodist Societies that John Wesley formed later.⁸⁰ As Chilcote details, “They organized small groups within the life of the church in order to rediscover a living faith rooted in love.” These “religious” or “United Societies,” were seen as catalysts for renewal and fostered a supportive environment⁸¹ for new disciples to explore their callings as Christians.

Even though she may have planted the seeds, apparently the Methodist movement had to grow on Susanna. “She was not initially convinced by the teachings,” notes DeRusha, “but the more she talked with her sons John and Charles about their newfound religious experiences, and the more she witnessed firsthand their remarkable accomplishments, the more enthusiastic she became of Methodism.”⁸² She also seems to have influenced the practice of lay preaching. In 1739, John shared his consternation with his mother that a young man named Thomas Maxfield began to preach in the Foundery Society in the Wesleys’ absence, according to Heitzenrater.⁸³ Her response: “Take care

⁷⁹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 19-20.

⁸⁰ DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 96.

⁸¹ Chilcote, *Her Own Story*, 18.

⁸² DeRusha, *50 Women Every Christian Should Know*, 96.

⁸³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 126–127.

what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him also yourself.”⁸⁴ John agreed with her: “It is of the Lord: let him do what seemth him good.”⁸⁵ This may have influenced how Wesley examined his preachers and connect to the biblical foundation of this project and Timothy’s call as a pastor and preacher.

Samuel Wesley died in 1735 and Susanna in 1742. According to Heitzenrater. “Wesley’s account of his mother’s death in July 1742 is remarkably restrained but appropriately appreciative, recognizing her important role (in her measure and degree) as a ‘preacher’ of righteousness.”⁸⁶ In his journal, he wrote:

I sat down on the bedside. She was in her last conflict; unable to speak, but, I believe, quite sensible. Her look was calm and serene, and her eyes fixed upward, while we commended her soul to God. From three to four the silver cord was loosing and the wheel breaking at the cistern; and then, without any struggle, or sigh or groan, her soul was set at liberty. But when we consider him under the character of a Savior we revive, and the greatness of the majesty which before astonished and confounded our weak faculties now enhances the value of his condescension towards us and melts our tempers into tenderness and love.⁸⁷

Dallimore notes that Susanna did write that “the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, these words stuck through my heart, and I knew that God for Christ’s sake had forgiven all my sins.”⁸⁸ While not as close to his own death, John also remarkably had a similar experience later in his life and ministry:

⁸⁴ Henry Moore, *Life of Rev. John Wesley, Volume 1* (London: James Nichols Printer, 1824), 414.

⁸⁵ Wesley Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (Burnley and Chester, 1898—), 27:8.

⁸⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 141.

⁸⁷ John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, 7 vols., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988–2003), vols. 18–24 of *The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley*, 3:29–30.

⁸⁸ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 162.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.⁸⁹

This moment in John's life is now about as legendary as the Epworth rectory and the famous fire he was plucked from.

This historically foundational research considered Susanna's childhood and young adulthood, followed by her raising and educating the Wesley children. Then it examined her ongoing influence on John and Charles Wesley and the early Methodist movement. Now this historical research concludes with a synthesis of the implications for the project and a brief reflection based on this conversation with Susanna Wesley.

Conclusion

Susanna Wesley's influence on her sons cannot be overstated. "It is true that John and Charles Wesley were vitally shaped by their mother," says Patrick Oden. She was "a predominantly positive influence that helped give them both a creative genius and intrepid spirit that led to the founding and thriving of the Methodist movement."⁹⁰ Dallimore adds that her qualities:

In varying degrees, were passed on to all of Susanna's children, and mankind has especial reason to be thankful that her sons Charles and John possessed them. We may all rejoice in the wealth of Christian song made available in the hymns composed by Charles, as well as in the masterly evangelistic career of John, culminating in his organizing of the Methodist Church. But although certain of these abilities were derived from their father, Samuel, it was especially from their

⁸⁹ John Wesley, 18:249–50.

⁹⁰ Oden, "Let Us Not Spend Our Time in Trifling," 117.

mother, Susanna, in the providence of God, that they inherited the qualities which enabled them to achieve so much.⁹¹

There would have been no Methodist movement of God's grace, had it not been for Susanna Wesley.

Synthesis

This conversation with Susanna Wesley has several important implications for this project. First, there is an intergenerational component. Three generations are represented: (1) Susanna's family of origin, (2) Samuel and Susanna Wesley themselves, and (3) the Wesley children. In each case, older adults engaged in intentional learning with their children as they became young adults and experienced symbiotic and collaborative relationships and discipleship.

The engagement of parents with their children at the time was deeply intentional with very strict discipline. While parents were often diligently invested in the academic and religious education of their children, what was the Church's role? According to Christopher Ritter, John Wesley expected seven key things of the Church regarding children: (1) teach them intentionally, (2) know them personally, (3) pray for them intensely, (4) mentor families meaningfully, (5) challenge ourselves continually, (6) shape our ministries appropriately, and (7) pray for them practically.⁹² This approach was certainly shaped by Susanna's influence on John in his theology, practice, and ecclesiology.

⁹¹ Dallimore, *Susanna Wesley*, 176.

⁹² Ritter, *Seven Things John Wesley Expected Us to Do for Kids*.

With regards to mentoring families, Ritter says, “When we minister to children, we do so humbly, realizing that the church programs do not possess anything even closely approximating the power of the home.”⁹³ This has far reaching implications for this project because the Church can really only come alongside young parents, families, and children to support the family in its primary role to disciple the children. An hour or two a week is nothing compared to the impact families have, which is to say nothing about those not yet connected to a Christian community. With regards to the Great Commandment to “love the LORD your God with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your might,” parents are to teach these things “diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit down in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut. 6:5, 7). Therefore, the project centered on how the “chronologically gifted” can come alongside young adults and young parents with children and teenagers to support and mentor them.

The problem and hypothesis also mention the established Church, to which Samuel and Susanna returned, and then John and Charles sought to reform and revive. This may be due, in part, because of a cross-pollination between Susanna’s choice to become part of the established Church and the Dissenting/Nonconformist background of her parents. Therefore, each successive generation may have been primed to pioneer unconventional and innovative approaches to reform and revive the established Church.

Beck uses the beautiful image of a tree to describe this sort of “blended ecology” of church, a foundational theme for this project and research. For him, “the tree itself is an image of the inherited [or established] church, with its rootedness and depth. It

⁹³ Ritter, *Seven Things John Wesley Expected Us to Do for Kids*, 427, Kindle.

possesses a resilient strength that will not submit to the parched context.” Again, the Wesleys never intended to found a new denomination, but rather desired to reform and revive the established Church. Beck continues, “The wild new life-forms, dependent on the tree’s shade and nourishing root system, are the emerging forms of church. These are the Fresh Expressions tethered to and dependent upon the inherited structure.” Enter the Wesleyan practices of the early Methodists like society, class, and band meetings, which were still intended to be connected to the local church in the “life-giving exchange happening between the inherited Church and emerging dynamic, imparting fresh air and creating new life where there was none before.”⁹⁴ Beck and Acevedo note how John Wesley saw that his beloved Anglican Church “was largely failing to meet the masses of people in his day,” to meet the people where they were. “There was a great gulf between the wealthy minority and the immobilized masses experiencing poverty. It was a time of enormous social and economic change.”⁹⁵ This is not to mention the deep racial divides that would become an issue for the Methodist movement, especially in the U.S. This sounds all too familiar as the Church in the United States ages and declines, as disconnect between people and the Church increases, and as racism and oppression are far from over.

Another implication for the project is how Susanna’s “kitchen prayer” sessions were seen as forerunners to Methodist structures, or intentional learning communities, i.e., society, class, and band meetings. While the Methodist movement grew out of the Wesley home, again, it could also be seen as a youth movement. Continuing to regard the

⁹⁴ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 11.

⁹⁵ Michael Adam Beck with Jorge Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), Location 167, Kindle.

blended ecology of church, Beck and Acevedo rightly contend that Susanna Wesley pioneered the first “Fresh Expression” in her kitchen.⁹⁶ Perhaps a simple meal was served, and it was like a “Dinner Church.” Couple this with Susanna’s, and then John’s, habits of spiritual formation (Scripture reading, prayer, meditation, self-reflection, journaling, observing the Sabbath, stewardship, reading and reflecting theologically, listening and talking with others, etc.), and this is the basis of methodical discipleship. As noted earlier, discipline is at the root of discipleship; leading yourself and others is also inherent to discipleship. The adage “leaders are learners” comes to mind for followers of Christ.

Other related implications include the one-to-one education and discipleship time Susanna had with her children, in addition to group instruction. Again, while there was recreation and play, there was also strict discipline and no playing around during learning time. This included religious instruction via singing psalms, reading Scripture, and learning piety, as well as traditional Anglican theology; these were a combination of faith and good works. The counter argument to her approach, as is often found in Fresh Expressions, is how the spiritual can be found in the seemingly unspiritual, i.e. walking the dog or playing games together with friends, meeting people at a coffee shop or brewery, etc. All these things can build community in a fun way and pave the way for new Christian communities to form. As a matter of fact, Soong-Chan Rah notes the superficial dichotomy between the sacred and the secular where everything Christian is considered good, and everything secular is bad, which creates an unhealthy disconnect

⁹⁶ Beck with Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions*, Location 242, Kindle.

from the world.⁹⁷ In one regard, everything is spiritual, or at least more nuanced than many people would like to admit, and the Church must adapt.

Discipleship, which can be defined as discipline or obedience to Christ's commands, was and is central to Methodism in particular, and to the journey of faith in general. Susanna was patient with her children, and there is also the recognition of "as they were capable of" in her method. It is important to recognize and meet people where they are in their discipleship. Beck and Acevedo refer to another metaphor of the fields as "the places where the people are, where they gather and share life."⁹⁸ Discipleship does not just happen in the church, but more often where people live, work, learn, play, and otherwise spend their time. It also happens where they are in their faith journey around what they are capable of and what the Holy Spirit is capable of doing in them.

This is another connection to the Biblical foundation and conversation with Paul regarding a young Timothy, who was like Paul's son in the faith. Paul had clear instructions and expectations for Timothy, just as Susanna had for her children. Susanna had a special relationship with John and his special inclinations, just as Paul had a special relationship with Timothy. So, how does the Church intentionally raise the bar of expectation and discipline with itself and the young people it works with in a grace-filled way? How does the Church encourage looking up to the "chronologically gifted" while also not looking down on youth? The Church does these things through encouraging intentionality in the pursuit of spiritual maturity in such a way that is appropriate to

⁹⁷ Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), Location 781, Kindle.

⁹⁸ Beck with Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions*, Location 146, Kindle.

where people are in their journey, while at the same time always calling people deeper to the fuller life that is in Jesus Christ. God loves us just the way we are, and God desires to transform us from the outside in and the inside out.

For Susanna and her family, further maturity often came through tragedy, including the death of nine children and her father and the two fires at the Epworth rectory. This was mixed with the joy of surviving children, including John and Charles, who went on to found the Methodist movement. It is understandable that she struggled with her faith, and everyone experiences both the challenges and joy this life brings. When people are struggling, they can be encouraged by those who come through with God's help and those who come alongside them, just as her parents and Samuel both encouraged and challenged Susanna. This adds to the implication for the project that people are meant to come alongside one another, especially as life happens and when they struggle with faith and doubt.

A final implication to consider is drawn from Susanna's urging John to pursue ministry as a vocation. For her, everyone, including women, should be permitted to do God's work. Therefore, the Church can also encourage young women and men to pursue ministry as a vocation and to see God's calling in their lives and professions.

Reflection: Susanna Wesley

In her own words, "I am content to fill a little space if God be glorified, but I want to fill that little space well."⁹⁹ Susanna Wesley filled more than a little space and had

⁹⁹ Rebecca Lamar Harmon, *Susanna: Mother of the Wesleys* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1968), 164.

tremendous influence on her children, especially John and Charles, founders of the Methodist movement. She is to be appreciated for far more than just being the mother of these two pioneers—as a pioneer in her own right. Susanna Wesley may be the mother of John and Charles, and rightly deserves to be called the Mother of Methodism, but she is also a spiritual mother and even spiritual guide and director¹⁰⁰ who has much to offer the inherited, emerging, and intergenerational church today.

¹⁰⁰ See Clare Wolfteich, “A Difficult Love: Mother as Spiritual Guide in the Writing of Susanna Wesley,” *Methodist History* 38, no. 1 (1999).

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Every week in worship, I introduce myself to help create an expectation that there will be new people and to not take it for granted that everyone knows everyone else. It helps to connect a name to a face and encourage others to do the same. I usually say something like, “Hello, friends. My name is Andrew. I am one of the pastors here, but I am just one of the ministers, since all of us are called to mission and ministry in Jesus’ name.” At the end of worship, I have also adopted a mentor’s benediction as one of my own. I ask the congregation, “Friends, do you know who you are?” and they now know to respond with, “God’s people in this time and in this place.” It is also on the screens and in the bulletins for our guests. Then I connect the benediction to the sermon in some fashion, urging us as the gathered people of God, in this time and in this place, to go and be the people of God in the places where we live, work, learn, play, and otherwise spend time.

This chapter describes and analyzes the theological theme of missional ecclesiology as foundational to this Doctor of Ministry project. Missional ecclesiology is the relevant to this project because it directly relates to helping older and younger generations to better understand and appreciate one another and see how symbiotic relationships and more robust missional vitality are possible in the life of the Church.

This chapter is engaged with classical and more current theologians and their contributions to the discussion of missional ecclesiology as they relate to the project, namely (1) Martin Luther and the priesthood of all believers (or universal priesthood); (2) John Wesley and Christian perfection (or entire sanctification), and (3) Lesslie Newbigin, around whose work theologians have developed the contemporary theology of the missional Church. Missional ecclesiological themes and issues that relate to, and are relevant to, this project will be considered, as well as the theological relevance of the project itself. Concluding remarks will summarize research findings and describe how missional ecclesiology is foundational to the project.

Missional Ecclesiology

Milfred Minatrea defines a missional church as “a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world.”¹ Stephen Rankin understands mission as “the church’s Spirit-enabled engagement in ministries that rescue people from the power of darkness … and transfer them into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son.” This goes beyond just evangelism of individuals to the transformation of communities and even entire social structures.² Paul Avis offers a definition for ecclesiology as “the discipline that is concerned with

¹ Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped by God’s Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 8.

² Stephen W. Rankin, “A Perfect Church: Toward Wesleyan Missional Ecclesiology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 84; see also Colossians 1:13.

comparative, critical, and constructive reflection on the dominant paradigms of the identity of the church.”³ Finally, Cornelius Niemandt says:

Ecclesiology is a theological discipline that seeks to understand and define the Church, and missional ecclesiology does this from a missional point of view where the Church is understood as a community of witness, called into being and equipped by God, and sent into the world to testify to and participate in Christ’s work.⁴

Therefore, a working definition for missional ecclesiology identifies the Church as a community of Spirit-enabled and disciple-making missionaries engaged in God’s transformation of lives, communities, and the world. James Cone adds that the Church is “that community of persons who ‘got the hint,’ and they thus refuse to be content with human pain and suffering.”⁵ The community of Spirit-enabled and disciple-making missionaries are also engaged in God’s elimination of pain, suffering, and oppression, often by entering incarnationally into each of these.

Paul Hooker says that “the Church does not have missions; instead, the mission of God creates the Church,”⁶ while Stephan Bevans similarly says that “the Church does not so much have a mission as … the mission has a church.” The Church is not about itself

³ Paul Avis, “Introduction to Ecclesiology,” *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2018), 1–30, <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199645831.013.28>, accessed January 2023.

⁴ Cornelius J.P. Niemandt, “Trends in Missional Ecclesiology: Original Research,” *Hts: Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012): 1.

⁵ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (version Fiftieth anniversary edition), Fiftieth anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 87.

⁶ Paul Hooker, “What Is Missional Ecclesiology?” *Northeast Georgia Presbytery* (2009), 1, https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/missional-ecclesiology09.pdf, accessed February 2023

but “the reign of God that it preaches, serves, and witnesses to...”⁷ As noted previously, William Temple is credited as saying that “the Church exists primarily for the sake of those who are still outside it.”⁸ As such, “mission trips,” whether foreign or domestic, are temporary while the mission field is also right here in the places we live, work, learn, play, and otherwise spend time. If the mission of God creates the Church, Martin Luther helps identify who makes up this community of witnesses called the Church.

Martin Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers

When Martin Luther posted his *95 Theses* against the Church’s teaching on indulgences, he did not expect to ignite such controversy, much less launch the Protestant Reformation. According to Robert Sorensen, who refers to him as “the accidental reformer,” Luther went on to suggest that all Christians could forgive sins, interpret Scripture, and discern doctrine “without mediation of the Church” and that these roles were not reserved for just clergy. This came to be known as Luther’s doctrine of “universal priesthood” or “the priesthood of all believers.”⁹ Brian Brewer marks this as one of Luther’s most important reforms, based in 1 Peter, “As you come to [Christ], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer

⁷ Stephan Bevans, “The Mission Has a Church, the Mission Has Ministers,” *Compass* 43 no. 3 (Spring 2009), 3, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/mission-has-church-ministers/docview/230016498/se-2>, accessed February 2023.

⁸ Alan Guiana, “Letter from the Archbishop of the West Indies,” *Theology* 432, no. 4 (June 1956): 240–243, <https://doi/10.1177/0040571X5605943205>, accessed February 2023.

⁹ Robert A. Sorensen, *Martin Luther and the German Reformation* (London: Anthem Press, 2016), 23–24, 69.

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession..." (2:4–5, 9). In Luther's ecclesiology, both clergy and laity are ordained as "priests" of the Church by virtue of their baptisms.¹⁰ Priests are not made in the flesh but born "through birth of the Spirit, by water and [the] Spirit of regeneration. ... Indeed, all Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians."¹¹

Ryan Fáinche poses a simple question, "Who are we?" where "we" strengthens the case that the Church is the priesthood of all the faithful and the people of God who reflect Christ and his priesthood and holiness.¹² For Luther, again, "we are all priests, as many of us are Christians."¹³ This relates to incarnational theology, as Fáinche further notes how Jesus went so far so at to identify himself with the Temple in Jerusalem, "the chosen dwelling place on earth of the Divine."¹⁴ Jesus says, "Something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6) and makes the case that God wants "mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13; see Hosea 6:6). Therefore, Christ dwelt, or 'tabernacled,' among us (John 1:14); he "became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood" (1:14, MSG).

By virtue of Christ's person and redemptive work, Paul makes the case that Christians are now temples of the Holy Spirit. "Or do you not know that your body is a

¹⁰ Brian C. Brewer, "'The' vs. 'All': Baptist Appropriations and Distortions of Martin Luther's Universal Priesthood," *Luther Refracted: The Reformer's Ecumenical Legacy* (1517 Media, Fortress Press, 2015), 48–49; note the connection to sacramental theology here, as discussed later in this chapter.

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Concerning the Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 19.

¹² Ryan Fáinche, "Holiness as Priesthood," *New Blackfriars* 97, no. 1068 (2016), 186.

¹³ Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 36: That Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 113.

¹⁴ Fáinche, "Holiness," 176–177.

temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Both Christ as Temple and followers of Christ, as temples of the Holy Spirit, connect incarnational theology to missional ecclesiology. The Church is not the bricks and mortar but the very body of Christ in the world, redeemed by his blood (1 Cor. 12:12–13, 27; Eph. 1:7; 4:4, 15–16). Luther refers to this as being attached to Christ,

This attachment to [Christ] causes me to be ... pulled out of my skin, and transferred into Christ and into His kingdom ... Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ's; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit.¹⁵

This phrase “pulled out of my skin and transferred into Christ” is an incarnational image reminiscent of Paul’s, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Christians do not lose their identity but actually find it in Christ as they are also transferred “into His kingdom” and Christ’s “grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation,” becoming one with him in the Spirit.

While Luther emphasized justification by faith alone,¹⁶ there are hints of sanctification here as well. While Luther may have unwittingly launched the Protestant Reformation, a few centuries later, John Wesley intentionally sought to renew the Church and then unintentionally started new ones too. Wesley’s missional ecclesiology, with an emphasis on Christian perfection, also known as entire sanctification, is an important consideration in relation to his work on personal and social holiness.

¹⁵ Luther, *Works*, Vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians Chapters 1-4*, 167-168.

¹⁶ Sorenson, “Martin Luther,” 45.

John Wesley and Christian Perfection

William Payne suggests that the 1784 Baltimore Christmas Conference marked (a) the birth of American Methodism as a new church by necessity rather than by Wesley's design and (b) the maturing of John Wesley's missional ecclesiology, namely that "the world was his parish."¹⁷ Wesley had respect for the Church of England and never intended to start a new church or denomination. Instead, he believed that the Church needed to be renewed, based on the personal experience of his own renewed faith. Methodism and Wesley's ecclesiology, according to Payne, grew out of his passion "for revitalization, holiness, and experiential faith" and combined institutional Christianity with evangelical faith.¹⁸ Payne describes Wesley's maturing ecclesiology at this time,

As a fellowship of believers, the Church shares both the apostolic experience of God's living presence and a burning desire to bring others into this personal experience. Ordinary people from within the fellowship of believers are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit for the ministry ... The first view sees the Church as an ancient institution to be preserved, the second, as a faithful few with a mission to the world.¹⁹

With regards again to the priesthood of all believers, all believers are sent by God in mission, whether or not their spiritual gift is apostleship. In other words, while not all are called to be apostles, all followers of Christ are indeed "sent ones" and called to God's

¹⁷ William Payne, "Discerning John Wesley's Missional Ecclesiology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 49, no. 2 (September 2014), 24–25, 28.

¹⁸ Payne, "Discerning John Wesley's," 37.

¹⁹ Payne, "Discerning John Wesley's," 36–37.

mission by virtue of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8) and the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–40).

In the same way, while not all are called to leadership in the Church, namely to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherd (pastors), and teachers (Eph. 4:11–16), all followers of Christ are called to be participants in these activities and have at least one spiritual gift.²⁰ For example, just because a person may not have the gift of evangelism does not mean that they are exempt from evangelizing, or sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. There is also something akin to apostolic succession in passing on the faith and the Church from generation to generation. This has direct implications for the project for mutual learning and growth in intergenerational relationships.

This relates to the biblical foundation of this project. Paul challenges both his young protégé, Timothy, and the church at Ephesus that Timothy led in Paul's stead, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). While Timothy did not replace Paul as an apostle, he was sent by God through Paul to serve in an apostle-like function at Ephesus. Paul trained the next generation, just like Susanna Wesley trained her children, two of whom went on to found and lead the early Methodist movement. For Paul and Timothy, Jesus and his disciples, Susanna and John and Charles, there was also a dynamic of personal and corporate Christian witness. In Wesleyan terms, this was an emphasis on personal and social holiness towards Christian perfection or entire sanctification.

²⁰ Alan Hirsch has done incredible work with this fivefold typology (APEST) for Church leadership; APEST is an acronym for the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors), and teachers in Eph 4:11–12 “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ...” Alan Hirsch, *5Q: Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ* (Colombia: 100 Movements Publishing, 2017).

Payne is right that, while Wesley's missional ecclesiology began to take shape after the Christmas Conference, Methodism also began to lose its way at the same time. As it became an established Church, Methodism became less of a revival movement and began to lose its missional edge. As "Methodism became respectable," like other mainline denominations, it "emphasized a professional clergy, compromised its evangelistic zeal, focused on congregations, and ceased to relate to the masses in a meaningful way." Yet it can be appreciated that Payne suggests,

Since American Methodism was born as a missionary church, a missional ethos remains in its ecclesial DNA. The revitalization of American Methodism will require the reclamation of its missional character. To do this, it must recapture the dynamic elements of Wesley's missional ecclesiology.²¹

This "creative tension" can be rediscovered, especially through an exploration of the doctrine of Christian perfection.

Rankin correctly argues that the doctrine of Christian perfection—also known as being made perfect in love of God and neighbor or entire sanctification—has fallen out of use when it should really shape the Church's identity and mission. He asks, "On what terms and for what end could we recognize a Church perfected in love?" He suggests that our growth towards perfection involves Christian mission by necessity, and as the Church moves toward perfection, "it becomes increasingly a manifestation of God's mission in the world. A perfected Church is pervasively missional."²² In short, the Church's mission is to love God and neighbor in such a way that others will come to know the love of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit and, in turn, seek to love God and neighbor

²¹ Payne, "Discerning John Wesley's," 46–47.

²² Rankin, "A Perfect Church," 83, 89.

themselves. In discipleship terms, the mission of the Church is to make disciple-makers who make disciples throughout the world. Even more straightforward, Brian Russell asserts that “discipleship can never be understood adequately apart from mission.

Following Jesus means following Jesus into the world to carry the good news about the kingdom to new audiences in new places.”²³ The Church is the beloved community of God seeking to love the people God loves in the world.

The dynamics of personal and corporate Christian witness are reflected in the Wesleyan emphasis on personal and social holiness. John Wigger notes the practical theological approach of Methodism: “The holiness ethos fostered by Methodism was more powerful than any abstract theological innovation at the time.”²⁴ Kenneth Collins notes that “Wesley took great pains to link the love of God with … holiness.” Wesley cautions that God “is infinitely distant from every touch of evil. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”²⁵ On the other hand, Rankin correctly notes the pendulum swing in scholarship from either personal to social ethics, and either interest in evangelism to social justice. “Christian perfection so affects relationships within the Christian community as to make that community unique in its ability to fulfill God’s redemptive purposes.”²⁶ This is not just the case for scholars; in general, followers of Christ tend to pick their favorite when both/and is preferred to an either/or approach.

²³ Brian Russell, *(re)Aligning with God: Reading Scripture for Church and World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 8.

²⁴ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 7.

²⁵ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 20.

²⁶ Rankin, “A Perfect Church,” 87.

In particular, far too many United Methodists, and others in the Wesleyan tradition, tend to pick and their favorite expression of grace. For some, preventient grace is preferred. This “preventing” grace is “all that is wrought in the soul” and how God draws a person to a desire for God and makes them aware of God’s work in the Holy Spirit.²⁷ This is often characterized as, God loves us before we know it, and there is nothing anyone can do to change that.

At the same time God desires to transform us from the outside in and the inside out to become who we were created and called to be. So, for others, justifying grace is their favorite. This is where God justifies us, or makes us right with God, through faith in the gift of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Justifying grace “implies both a supernatural evidence of God and of the things of God, a kind of spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof.”²⁸ Those who prefer justifying grace are excited by rebirth moments of turning towards God’s new life in Christ where God works from the outside in to change our mind into “the mind which was in Christ.”²⁹ It is at this point that sanctification begins; God’s work from the inside out.

While it would seem that this would be the top choice, fewer seem to pick sanctifying grace as their favorite. This is where growth even stalls for some, as some prefer to be saved and then just wait for heaven. Perhaps it is easy to get hung up on the word ‘perfection,’ which is not the same as making no mistakes. Sometimes God loving and saving us feels more glamorous than the daily grind of God’s continued work on our

²⁷ John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *The Works of John Wesley Vol. 3* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 158.

²⁸ Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *Works Vol. 3*, 160.

²⁹ Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *Works Vol. 3*, 158.

character and holiness to see us mature, or be made perfect, in love of God and neighbor.

Yet it should be more exciting that “God will thus ‘renew’ us ‘in the spirit of our mind’ and ‘create us anew’ in the ‘image of God,’ wherein we were first created”³⁰ as we are sanctified. While Wesley included other expressions of grace, prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace are all part of one grace in three key expressions.

Leonard Sweet and Michael Beck argue that “the fundamental Christian belief is that God remakes human beings from the inside out by sacrificial love, not that God remakes humanity from the outside in by cultural change,”³¹ which does not contradict the above because it is not the culture that should change Christians but God changing Christians and using them to affect the culture. In salvific terms, Christ has saved, Christ is saving, and Christ will save. As Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch note, it is far beyond presentations of the Gospel and altar calls.

Altar calls and standard formulations of the gospel merely ask for ‘belief’ or intellectual assent in order to be ‘saved.’ There is no mention of any ongoing obligation to live under a sovereign King, or for the need to conform one’s life in a lifelong process of becoming more like him.³²

Christians are called to make disciples, not mere converts. Mission, in light of Christian perfection, for Rankin, is “the practical, tangible, and transformative demonstration of love for neighbor”³³ to become, not just more like Jesus, but “little Christs” or Christians. This is embedded in the Great Commandment to “love the Lord your God” with all that

³⁰ Wesley, “On Perfection,” *Works Vol. 3*, 77; Wesley’s exegesis and sermon on Eph 4:21–24.

³¹ Leonard Sweet and Michael Adam Beck, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on the Front Lines* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Service, Inc., 2020), 18.

³² Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, Mass. Sydney: Hendrickson Publishers Strand Pub, 2009), 38.

³³ Rankin, “A Perfect Church,” 104.

you are. However, Jesus did not stop there but added, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” All Scripture hangs on these two commandments (Matt. 22:37–40; see also Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18). To love God is to love neighbor, and to love neighbor is to love God. Jesus could not separate the two; being made perfect in love of God and neighbor is the aim of Christian perfection.

Elaine Heath and Larry Duggins tie this together, “Evangelism is the invitation to discipleship, which is a call to holiness, and holiness is an incarnational immersion in the love of God.”³⁴ On this note, being a missional church is a team sport; the sum of the parts of the body of Christ is far better than the individuals alone. Returning to Ephesians, the building up of the body of Christ continues “...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature [person]hood, the measure of the stature and fullness of Christ...” (Eph. 4:13).

For Lesslie Newbigin, unity is misunderstood if it is isolated from the fulfillment of God’s purpose to “unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:10).”³⁵ While it may be cliché, it is true that we are better together in Christ, and together, we are to mature in Christ towards being perfected in love of God and neighbor. This compels us forward in our faith and focuses our missional ecclesiology towards our knowing, loving, and following Jesus, and helping others to do the same, a working definition for discipleship.

³⁴ Elaine A. Heath and Larry Duggins, *Missional. Monastic. Mainline. A Guide to Starting Missional Micro-Communities in Historically Mainline Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 103.

³⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, “The Nature of the Unity We Seek: From the Church of South India,” *Religion in Life* 26, no. 2 (1957): 187.

Lesslie Newbigin and Missional Ecclesiology

Moving into contemporary views of missional ecclesiology, Chris Backert notes that the conversation about the missional church really picked up in the 1970s when The Gospel and Our Culture Network formed and sought to develop the theology of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin.³⁶ Mark Laing rightly suggests that the Church must recover it, since the establishment of a Christianized West marginalized our missiology, left us missionless, and far too inwardly focused. Our missiology has become “increasingly abstract, acontextual, intellectual, and concerned with ecclesiology [only]” and has “divorced mission from its agenda.”³⁷ Sadly, a robust missional ecclesiology has largely been lost.

Since missional ecclesiology as a study is mostly a contemporary conversation, the bulk of this chapter is spent interacting with Newbigin, who many scholars see as key in recovering a more missional Church. Just as Wesley saw a Church that had lost its way in 18th century England, Newbigin saw a 20th century England that had become a missional context. While the Church in the West was in decline “in the face of this modern Western culture” and “everywhere in retreat,” the Gospel continued “to find new victories among the non-Western premodern” parts of the world.³⁸ As the Western

³⁶ Christ Backert, “Emerging Church and Missional Church: Same Difference?” *Fresh Expressions US* (April 18, 2016). <http://freshexpressionsus.org/2016/04/18/emerging-church-missional-church-difference/>, accessed February 2023; see also <https://gocn.org>.

³⁷ Mark Laing, “Recovering Missional Ecclesiology in Theological Education,” *International Review of Mission* 98, no. 1 (2009): 11–12. doi:10.1111/j.1758-6631.2009.00002.x.

³⁸ Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 66.

Church became respectable and lost its missional edge, Newbigin's reasons were that modernization marginalized religion and became "the controlling doctrine for public life [that] drives religion into a smaller and smaller enclave,"³⁹ and,

The peaceful co-existence of Christianity with post-Enlightenment culture ... has endured so long that it is hard for the Church now to recover the standpoint for a genuinely missionary approach to our 'modern' culture ... The Church has lived so long as a permitted and even privileged minority, accepting relegation to the private sphere in a culture whose public life is controlled by a totally different vision of reality, that it has almost lost the power to address a radical challenge to that vision and therefore to 'modern Western civilization' as a whole."⁴⁰

It is no wonder, then, that the Church is in decline in the West because "instead of confronting our culture with the gospel," the Church is "trying to fit the gospel into our culture."⁴¹ To recover a missionary approach, again, the body of Christ must realize that "the Church does not exist for itself; it exists for the sake of fulfilling God's purpose for the world."⁴² Similarly, Jürgen Moltmann says that "mission does not come from the Church; it is from mission and in the light of mission that the Church has to be understood."⁴³ Missional ecclesiology involves a Church looking more outward than inward. Gustavo Gutiérrez notes that the early church was able to live "spontaneously in this way" because "its minority status in society and the consequent pressure that the non-Christian world exercised on it made it quite sensitive to the action of Christ beyond its

³⁹ Newbigin, "Gospel and Culture—but Which Culture?" *Missionalia*, no. 3 (1989), 213.

⁴⁰ Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 22-23.

⁴¹ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 67; see also Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*, 23.

⁴² Newbigin, *A Faith for This One World?* (London: SCM, 1961), 81.

⁴³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 10.

frontiers,”⁴⁴ while the Church today has been desensitized to how Christ is moving in the world outside its four walls.

Moltmann, then, further notes that “one of the strongest impulses toward the renewal of the theological concept of the Church comes from the theology of mission.”⁴⁵ Church renewal is biblical, theological, and rooted in the Gospel in both Testaments, which refer to “the beginning and the end of all things and therefore the real meaning of all that happens,”⁴⁶ according to Newbigin. Similarly, Russell states that “the Scriptures are the narrative about God’s mission from Creation to New Creation.”⁴⁷ Michael Goheen explains that Newbigin defined the Gospel as,

The good news is a message about the fullest revelation and the final accomplishment of the end of universal history—the comprehensive restoration of all creation and the whole of human life in the kingdom of God—present and coming in history in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit’s power.⁴⁸

Just as the Church does not exist for itself but as a Gospel-sharing mission by the Spirit’s power, Russell poignantly says that “the Gospel comes to us on the way to other places and people. An experience of God’s graciousness is not an end in itself; it is a commissioning for the mission.”⁴⁹ Russell’s main goal in writing is that the realignment with God involves mission, community, and holiness; to follow Jesus is to be “a

⁴⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 130.

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *The Church*, 7.

⁴⁶ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission* (1963; reprint, Carlisle U.K.: Paternoster, 1998), 26.

⁴⁷ Russell, *(re)Aligning*, 2.

⁴⁸ Michael W. Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2018), 42.

⁴⁹ Russell, *(re)Aligning*, 8.

missional community that reflects and embodies God's character to, for, and in the world.”⁵⁰ The imago Dei is wrapped up in the missio Dei and vice versa.

Therefore, the “blended ecology” continues to resurface in this research. To review, the blended ecology refers to “Fresh Expressions of church in symbiotic relationships with inherited forms of Church in such a way that the combining of these attractional and missional modes blend to create a nascent form.”⁵¹ Again, Fresh Expressions of Church are forms of church “for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of those who are not yet part of any church,” while the inherited forms of church are forms of church “passed on as a precious gift by the saints of generations past,”⁵² i.e. the traditions of the institutional Church. The Fresh Expressions movement is a missional movement.

Related Theological Themes and Issues

Soteriology, or salvation theology, is far more than a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ” or being saved from hell for heaven. Russell says that “salvation is not an escape from the earth, but rather it is a return to the realities of Eden.”⁵³ Salvation is really the result God’s mission to heal and restore humanity and all creation. Newbigin says salvation is “the healing of that which is wounded, the mending of that which is broken, the setting free of that which is bound.”⁵⁴ The Greek word for ‘save’ is ‘sozo’

⁵⁰ Russell, *(re)Aligning*, 9.

⁵¹ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 18.

⁵² Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 18–19.

⁵³ Russell, *(re)Aligning*, 27.

⁵⁴ Newbigin, *Sin and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 14.

and is used in the sense of ‘save,’ but also, ‘heal,’ ‘preserve,’ and ‘rescue.’⁵⁵ ‘Soteria’ is the word for ‘salvation,’ where ‘soteriology’ comes from, and it is used in the sense of, ‘welfare,’ ‘prosperity,’ ‘deliverance,’ ‘preservation,’ ‘salvation,’ and ‘safety.’ Therefore, salvation also means healing, wholeness, preservation, rescue, restoration, etc. In “The Scripture Way of Salvation” sermon, Wesley says salvation,

Is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness ... It is not a blessing that lies on the other side of death ... it is a present thing ... [it] might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.⁵⁶

A theology of call/vocation means that all Christians are called, have a vocation, or have been commissioned by virtue of the Great Co-Mission to “go therefore and make disciples” (Matt. 28:18–20) as empowered by the Holy Spirit to “be [Jesus’] witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Noting the concentric circles of missional movement outward, Newbigin says that God’s mission “is let loose into the world in expanding and ever-widening circles as the gospel is carried out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.”⁵⁷ Vocation is more than employment; it is God’s calling to daily take the Gospel with us in going, even to the ends of the earth.

Taken together Trinitarian theology and the missio Dei, or mission of God, Niemandt rightly notes how “mission begins in the heart of the Triune God, and the love that binds together the Holy Trinity, overflows to all humanity and creation.”⁵⁸ To understand the missionary church theologically in a world-wide context is to understand

⁵⁵ Strong’s Concordance, 4982.

⁵⁶ Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *Works*, 2:156.

⁵⁷ Newbigin, *A Faith for This One World?* 85.

⁵⁸ Niemandt, “Trends,” 2.

it in the context of the missio Dei, which is not just a related theme but the central theme of missional ecclesiology; the mission of the Church is really the mission of God.

Furthermore, D.J. Louw says, “It is imperative to found the missio Dei (divine act of sending and mission) on the passio Dei (divine act of compassionate being-with and incarnate interpretation.”⁵⁹ The Church is sent as the image of God made perfect in compassion—literally meaning “with passion” or “with suffering.” Just as Christ enters into human suffering, the Church must also be with others in their suffering as Christ’s very hands and voice in the world. Entering into the suffering of others includes standing for justice against all forms of oppression. When it comes to the plight of persons of color, Ibram Kendi says, “Race is a genetic mirage.”⁶⁰ Michael Beck and Stephanie Moore Hand expand on this to note that all human beings are 99.9% the same genetically, regardless of skin color. “As Genesis 1:27 informs us, all human beings are created in the image of God. We have a shared humanity that flows from the diversity of our creator God.”⁶¹ God counts all people as beloved and valuable children of God.

Regarding making disciples of all nations, or ethnicities, in the name of the Trinity (Matt. 28:19), Moltmann adds that the Church is being sent in the same way that the Father sent the Son and the Holy Spirit, thereby discovering “its place and function within this history.”⁶² Newbigin concurs that “the Church’s mission to all the nations is

⁵⁹ D. J. Louw, “Missio Dei as Embodiment of Passio Dei: the Role of God-Images in the Mission-Outreach and Pastoral Caregiving of the Church – a Hermeneutical Approach,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Missiology*, 44, no. 3 (2016): 351.

⁶⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (New York, NY: One World), 53.

⁶¹ Michael Adam Beck and Stephanie Moore Hand, *Doing Justice Together: Fresh Expressions Pathways for Healing in Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2024), xvii.

⁶² Moltmann, *The Church*, 10–11.

participation in the work of the Triune God.”⁶³ When the Church developed the doctrine of the Trinity, it was only making explicit the nature of God because “it is in Trinitarian terms that we have to understand the nature and authority of the mission in which we are called to share.”⁶⁴ The Church makes disciples in its going in God’s name.

Again, while not all Christians are sent as apostles, all are called and sent by virtue of God’s sent-ness and mission. Frost and Hirsh say that followers of Christ see God differently through Jesus’ eyes, as no longer “remote or detached, but through the paradigm of the missio Dei—and in so doing, they will discover the sent and sending God.” Therefore, the Church is less a religious institution and more a “community of Jesus followers devoted to participating in the mission.” Frost and Hirsch coin the phrase “*participatio Christi*,” which allows us to see the world “not simply as fallen or depraved but as bearing the mark of the *imago Dei*”⁶⁵ as Christians participate with Christ. Therefore, according to Cone, “the image of God is not merely a personal relationship with God, but is also that constituent of humanity which makes all people struggle against captivity”⁶⁶ and stand against oppression in all its forms.

The Trinity and the missio Dei bring the conversation back to incarnational theology, also weaving in Christology and pneumatology, or theology of the Holy Spirit. Incarnationally, the Church is called to live as the hands and voice of Jesus, where Christ is the center of the Gospel message that it bears witness to and lives out in the world.

⁶³ Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today’s Mission*, 54.

⁶⁴ Newbigin, “The Future of Missions and Missionaries, *Review and Expositor* 74, no. 2 (1977): 214.

⁶⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 82.

⁶⁶ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* Rev. ed., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 92.

Niemandt says that a missional-incarnational ecclesiology leads to “being Church in the world,”⁶⁷ while Newbigin says: “the center of [Christ’s] teaching was himself … that in him the Kingdom of God has come”⁶⁸ with its Kingdom values. Heath and Duggins describe how Jesus fleshed this out by living with the disciples and,

Calling people who were naturally at odds together into community. Ever so slowly they came to faith as they interacted with Jesus in everyday life and were disillusioned of their own bad theology. Ever so slowly they learned that women are human. Samaritans are human. Tax collectors are human. Even Roman centurions are human. Jesus shows us that evangelism is a process that takes much time and loving, committed genuine friendships between people.⁶⁹

Jesus Christ, God incarnate, gave us patterns and rhythms for incarnational living. While in his full divinity, he showed us what the realized image of God looks like and what it means to be fully human. As such, Frost and Hirsch say that “the incarnation tells us that God looks, acts, thinks, and sounds like Jesus. … We lose any authentic knowledge of God to the extent that we do not pattern the life of the Church directly on Jesus and his kingdom.”⁷⁰ Individually and together, the Church should also look, act, think, and sound like Jesus.

While Jesus is the center, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8), even as “the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16). Niemandt says that “life in the Holy Spirit is the essence of mission.”⁷¹ Therefore, “the Church’s mission is simply the continued ministry of that same divine

⁶⁷ Niemandt, “Trends,” 4.

⁶⁸ Newbigin, *Faith for This One World?* 58.

⁶⁹ Heath and Duggins, *Missional*, 25.

⁷⁰ Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 25.

⁷¹ Niemandt, “Trends,” 2.

Spirit who was in Jesus.”⁷² Newbigin further qualifies this witness as not our own, but the Spirit’s. “It is not the Church who bears witness and that the Spirit helps the Church to do so,” rather “the Church is the place where the Spirit is present as witness. The witness is thus not an accomplishment of the Church but a promise to the Church.”⁷³ If there is any accomplishment of the Church, it is simply recognizing and living into this promise.

Worship and sacramental theology connect to missional ecclesiology, as Newbigin notes, through the presence of the Spirit in “praise and the offering up of spiritual sacrifice,” which then extends “throughout the community to bear the love of God into every secular happening and meeting.”⁷⁴ John Piper says that “missions exists because worship doesn’t.”⁷⁵ Worship, in turn, should inspire us towards missional living. Again, the Church is the gathered people of God in worship on Sundays and the sent people of God in mission the rest of the week. Note the connection back to Luther’s universal priesthood in how Newbigin says,

The Church exists in its prime reality from Monday to Saturday, in all its members, dispersed throughout the fields and homes and offices and factories, bearing the royal priesthood of Christ in every corner of His world. On the Lord’s Day it is withdrawn into itself to renew its being in the Lord Himself.⁷⁶

⁷² Newbigin, *Faith for This One World?* 86.

⁷³ Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 38.

⁷⁴ Newbigin, “Evangelism in the City,” *Reformed Review* (Autumn 1987): 4.

⁷⁵ John Piper, “Missions Exist Because Worship Doesn’t,” *Desiring God*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/missions-exists-because-worship-doesnt-a-bethlehem-legacy-inherited-and-bequeathed>, accessed March 2023.

⁷⁶ Newbigin, “Bible Studies: Four Talks on 1 Peter,” in *We Were Brought Together*, ed. David M. Taylor (Sydney: Australian Council for the World Council of Churches, 1960), 96–97.

While church buildings and worship environments are sacred spaces, so are our homes, workplaces, schools, and other places people gather to share in community and break bread together.

Regarding sacramental theology, Newbigin notes that “the Church lives by faith in Christ, and the Word and Sacraments are the means whereby Christ offers Himself” to all.⁷⁷ In the broken body and shed blood of Christ, the Church recognizes how it too is the broken body for the world. Beck gets at the very heart of the sacramental nature of the mission of God:

The Church is not in the self-preservation business, the Church is in the self-donation business. The very Eucharistic nature of the body of Christ is to break pieces of ourselves off and give them away to a hungry world. Unfortunately, when our church is in a decline cycle, we clench our fists, desperately grasping at what’s left. Yet, if we open our hands and give what we are away through our own self-death, we release God to catalyze resurrection.⁷⁸

In addition to the self-giving sacramental theology of the Church, a theology of leadership and polity is essential to the life of the Church.

The “structure of the Church is itself an expression of the Gospel,”⁷⁹ says Newbigin. He also suggests that, while the Church has begun to recover a missionary theology of the Church, the actual structure of our churches does not fully reflect this⁸⁰ because churches have become “clubs for self-centered enjoyment of the benefits of the

⁷⁷ Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defense of the South India Scheme* (London: SCM, 1948), 102.

⁷⁸ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 139.

⁷⁹ Newbigin, review of *Canterbury Pilgrim*, by A.M. Ramsey, and *Great Christian Centuries to Come*, ed. Christian Martin, *Ecumenical Review* 27 (1975): 172.

⁸⁰ Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Updated Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 148.

Christian religion.”⁸¹ His most severe critique is that the Church thinks its primary duty is to care for its own members, which means “its duty to those outside drops into second place,” and the individual believer becomes just “a passive recipient of the means of grace which is the business of the Church to administer.”⁸² Herein lies another problem: while administrative functions of the Church may look business-like, the Church is not a business. Sweet and Beck suggest that “the whole Church must restructure itself to focus half our energy on caring for the tree [the inherited Church] and half our energy planting Fresh Expressions in the community.”⁸³ Again, this reflects the blended ecology thread in this research project.

Another theme reflected throughout, Newbigin insists that the Church “does not exist for itself or for what it can offer its members.”⁸⁴ Rather, according to Goheen, it “exists to carry out God’s mission in the particular place in which it is set.”⁸⁵ The Church is contextual; Sweet and Beck talk about the importance of leadership developing “contextual intelligence,” which is “the ability to accurately diagnose a context and make the correct decisions regarding what to do.”⁸⁶ They also note the complexity of growing in contextual intelligence because it includes geographic, temporal, cultural, economic, organizational, emotional, political, and other contextual threads. This involves adapting

⁸¹ Newbigin, “Developments during 1962: An Editorial Survey,” *International Review of Mission* 52, no. 205 (January 1963), 8.

⁸² Newbigin, *Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), 166-67.

⁸³ Sweet and Beck, *Contextual Intelligence*, 79.

⁸⁴ Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom*, 45.

⁸⁵ Goheen, *The Church*, 122.

⁸⁶ Sweet and Beck, *Contextual Intelligence*, 79.

“information appropriately for that environment to solve specific challenges and create a flourishing future.”⁸⁷ For example, Mark DeYmaz stretches the Church further by prophetically asking, “Can a church really hope to redeem a community if it does not authentically reflect its community in terms of ethnic and economic diversity?”⁸⁸ How many churches actually look like their neighborhoods? As often accredited to Martin Luther King, Jr., Sunday morning worship remains “one of the most segregated hours in Christian America.” This is an area where churches are out of step with their contexts.

Returning to spiritual gifts, there is an argument that Ephesians 4:11–16 is a leadership model that can be reclaimed broadly across most contexts. As noted earlier with Hirsch’s work on the fivefold typology for church leadership, APEST is an acronym describing how some are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors), and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry [and] for building up the body of Christ...” (Eph. 4:11–12). While Scripture also includes elders, bishops, pastors, and deacons, Newbigin says that these leaders are settled to lead in one location while apostles, prophets, and evangelists [shepherds and teachers] are mobile and non-localized.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, church leadership has become far too bureaucratic, hierarchical, and government-like, and Newbigin adds that leadership has seen the “practical elimination of the universal travelling ministry” of these leadership offices⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Sweet and Beck, *Contextual Intelligence*, 20.

⁸⁸ Mark DeYmaz, *Disruption: Repurposing the Church to Redeem the Community* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 55.

⁸⁹ Goheen, 132; see also Newbigin, “How Should We Understand Sacraments and Ministry?” (Paper for the Anglican-Reformed International Commission meeting, London, 1938), 9.

⁹⁰ Newbigin, “Ministry,” unpublished paper, 1982, 8.

and needs to recover them. It is ironic that this is the case with the Church when the world is more fluid and mobile than ever.

While the UMC system in particular is itinerant and intended to be apostolic (i.e. clergy are sent to appointments by a bishop), not all pastors are shepherds. However, the Church has relegated most clergy to pastoring and teaching roles when they might have spiritual gifts as apostles, prophets, or evangelists. Newbigin is correct that the Church does not value these three as much as it should. It is in the space of Holy Spirit gifted leadership and APEST typology that the Church, according to Newbigin, can become,

The place where every human being is given the freedom of his own home where he can know and love and obey God as Father, and Jesus as his Lord in the power of the Spirit who is himself the living presence now of the blessedness to which all are called.”⁹¹

These leadership gifts are not better than the others⁹² but work in conjunction with them. Those with leadership gifts equip and lead by example, just like Jesus said, “Follow me,”⁹³ or Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, NIV). What would it look like if the Church more effectively helped people discover, develop, and unleash their spiritual gifts in the Church and the world? What would it look like if more Christians could actually say, “Follow me as I follow Christ?”

Russell circles this conversation back to the through-line of Christian perfection that Rankin stressed: “A transformed life witnesses to outsiders the reality of God’s kingdom. The work of sanctification is an ongoing one in the life of Christ followers.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Newbigin, “What Is ‘a Local Church Truly United?’” *Ecumenical Review* 29 (1977), 128.

⁹² See Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11.

⁹³ See Matt 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21; Mark 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:23, 59; 18:22; John 1:43; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19, 22.

⁹⁴ Russell, *(re)Aligning*, 171.

He adds to the conversation that holiness begins with each person, “but if it ends with the individual then it is not a biblical holiness. Holiness is always social. We reflect God’s character as a testimony for others of God’s glory.”⁹⁵ For Newbigin “all the benefits which Christ was sent to bring” allow people to “be restored to their true humanity because they are reconciled with their Maker,”⁹⁶ restoring the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27) in each person and restoring all creation.

Correspondingly, this is also the end goal of the mission of God. Until this is accomplished, the Church has a mission—really, the mission has a Church. This mission is as much about social justice as it is personal evangelism, and this much is clear for Newbigin, “Action for justice and peace in the world is not something which is secondary [or] marginal to the central task of evangelism.”⁹⁷ More pointedly, we misunderstand if we think “we can enjoy salvation through Jesus Christ” while we disregard action for justice as optional or an “inferior substitute for the work of passing on the good news of salvation. Action for social justice is salvation in action.”⁹⁸ Making the case that Christian theology is a theology of liberation, James Cone boldly asserts that “theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to rise out of the community of the oppressed” because the God revealed in Jesus Christ “is the God of and for those who labor and are overladen.”⁹⁹ Christians are often guilty of coopting the Gospel for their

⁹⁵ Russell, *(re)Aligning*, 172.

⁹⁶ Newbigin, “The Life and Mission of the Church,” in *We Were Brought Together*, ed. David M. Taylor (Sydney: Australian Council for the World Council of Churches, 1960), 7.

⁹⁷ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 137.

⁹⁸ Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations of Christian Ministry in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 109.

⁹⁹ Cone, *A Black Theology*, 18. See Matthew 11:28 and Luke 4:18-19.

own means and missing its central nature of liberation, especially in Western, predominantly Caucasian theology, which I have heard described as the only theology that does not need a label. White heterosexual men just do theology, while others have to do feminist theology, womanist theology, queer theology, etc. In other words, Cone and others are forced to assert things like, “Black theology is Christian theology,”¹⁰⁰ just as Black history is American history. The danger is creating God in our image or coopting Jesus into our own culture.

Newbigin admits as much for himself that he had “to some degree coopted Jesus into the worldview of [his] culture.”¹⁰¹ He says that if what God has done through the Gospel is true, “it necessarily must become the starting point and the controlling reality of all thought, all action, and all hope.”¹⁰² While the Gospel is shared contextually, it also shapes our worldview; our worldview does not shape the Gospel. Jesus’ ministry called individuals to “personal and costly discipleship,” says Newbigin, and it also “challenged the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world, and the cross was the price paid for that challenge.”¹⁰³ As with the spiritual gifts for leadership, there is also spiritual opposition. Newbigin says that “a society which accepts the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as its ultimate standard of reference,” not coopting Christ for its own purposes,

Will have to be a society whose whole style of life, and not only its words, conveys something of that radical dissent from the world which is manifested in

¹⁰⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology*, 20.

¹⁰¹ Newbigin, *A Word in Season*, 99.

¹⁰² Newbigin, “The Gospel and Modern Western Culture,” unpublished article, Newbigin Archives of Birmingham (n.d.), 13.

¹⁰³ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 220.

the Cross, and at the same time something of that affirmation of the world which is made possible by the resurrection.¹⁰⁴

This concurs with Rankin's point that God's mission is more than just evangelism of individuals; it also transforms communities and social structures.¹⁰⁵ Newbigin says that the mission of Christ and the Church "has to be both word and deed and the life of a community which already embodies a foretaste of God's kingdom."¹⁰⁶ As with personal and social holiness, the tendency is to focus on either the inner worship life or outer mission life. "It is always relatively easy for the Church to do one of these things and neglect the other," while a faithful missionary Church will "live in the tension of loyalty to both tasks," and, in that tension, "bear witness to the gospel."¹⁰⁷ Instead of living in either/or binaries, missional ecclesiology calls the Church to live into both/and tensions.

Regarding social justice, Cone says, "Life-giving power for the poor and the oppressed is the primary criterion that we must use to judge the adequacy of our theology. Not abstract concepts."¹⁰⁸ Standing with Black Americans and other oppressed people groups must be a central concern of the Church. As John Wesley says, there is "no holiness but social holiness."¹⁰⁹ Like the Great Commandment, the two go hand in hand; personal holiness must lead to social holiness because Christianity is not "solitary

¹⁰⁴ Newbigin, "Stewardship, Mission, and Development" (address, Annual Stewardship Conference of the British Council of Churches, Stanwick, 1970), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Rankin, "A Perfect Church," 84.

¹⁰⁶ Newbigin, "A Missionary's Dream," *Ecumenical Review* 43, no. 1 (January 1991):6.

¹⁰⁷ Newbigin, "The Evangelization of Eastern Asia," *International Review of Mission* 39, no. 154 (April 1950), 143.

¹⁰⁸ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969; repr., New York, NY: Orbis, 1997), 12.

¹⁰⁹ John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, page viii.

religion.” This includes standing with the marginalized and entering into the suffering of the hurting with compassion, just as Christ entered into our suffering with compassion.

Conclusion

Among the people of God in the Church and the people God loves in the world and the community that I serve as a pastor, I am just one of the ministers, called “to equip the saints for works of ministry” and mission “for the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). All are God’s people in the times and places where they live, work, learn, play, or otherwise spend time. Christians are the gathered people of God in Christian community when they come together, and then they are the sent people of God when they go into the community and world. In summary, being made perfect in love of God and neighbor, and helping others also come to know, to love, and to follow Jesus Christ is the core of our missional ecclesiology.

This research engaged with classical and contemporary theologians and their contributions to the discussion of missional ecclesiology, as they relate to this project. It especially engaged with Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Lesslie Newbigin, the “father” of our current understanding of missional ecclesiology. Key theological issues, among others, included the priesthood of all believers (or universal priesthood), Christian perfection (or entire sanctification), and beginning to recover a theology of the missional Church. This synthesis of learning considers how missional ecclesiology relates to, and is relevant to, the project, as well as the theological relevance of the project itself. These concluding remarks will summarize the research findings and describe how missional ecclesiology is foundational to the project.

Synthesis

This chapter examined how “the Church does not so much have a mission as ... the mission has a church”¹¹⁰ and how it is God’s mission (missio Dei) given to the Church. A working definition for missional ecclesiology identifies the Church as a community of Spirit-enabled and disciple-making missionaries engaged in God’s transformation of lives, communities, and the world. Moynagh notes that encountering a missional God means mission is in God’s very character. Therefore, since “mission is not a second step for God...it must not be a second step for the church.”¹¹¹ Beck, reinforces this and emphasizes our communal nature, “Individuals don’t revitalize churches; Spirit-filled communities of Jesus followers do.”¹¹² Implications of missional ecclesiology are a potential solution to the problem that many older and younger adults do not know how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission—as the gathered and sent people of God of all ages.

This research considered how Martin Luther’s theology of “universal priesthood,” or “priesthood of all believers,” means that all Christians are “priests,” not just credentialed clergy (see 1 Pet. 2:9). For Luther, “All Christians are priests, and all priests are Christians.”¹¹³ This chapter also considered how the Church is an incarnational

¹¹⁰ Bevans, “The Mission,” 3.

¹¹¹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 145.

¹¹² Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 70.

¹¹³ Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 40: *Concerning the Ministry*, 19.

people beyond physical buildings. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, and followers of Christ, Christians, are “little Christs.” By virtue of the image of God (imago Dei; see Gen. 1:26–27) in all people, and while not all are Christ-followers or part of this royal priesthood, all have gifts to offer humanity and even the Church. In Fresh Expressions, new Christian communities are formed by encouraging those who are exploring faith and Christ to fully participate in planning and leadership. The Church should recognize the gifts that all people bring to the table, not just all Christians.

Stephen Rankin makes a compelling case that John Wesley’s theology of Christian perfection, or entire sanctification, is a central theme of missional ecclesiology, and it is a focus in this research. After all, the Methodist movement was a holiness movement that sought to renew the Church. Again, all are called and sent by God by virtue of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) to see the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–40) come to fruition as Christians are made perfect in love of God and neighbor as they help others to do the same.

Methodism is also a missional movement where the world itself, not any bricks or mortar, is our parish. Just as this research on missional ecclesiology turned up nothing on the necessity of a sermon or particular style of music and so on, there was nothing about the importance of a church building. This may be the key missional and theological challenge in my context, a historic downtown “First Church.” The Church is not bricks and mortar; the Church is the beloved people of God with the people in the world God also loves. Furthermore, while attractional and inherited models of Church have their place, missional models must also be embraced. Many people in my context both love the historic beauty of the building and recognize that community members may find it

intimidating. At the same time, many continue to think in terms of getting people to come to church, or come back to church, rather than going in mission to be the Church.

Beck says as much, that “an inherited congregation must recover the missional purpose for why they exist.”¹¹⁴ While the mission statement of my context is the same as the UMC as a whole, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” it should be “to go and make disciples...” Mishawaka First’s vision statement is very missional: “We are believers who act as the hands and voice of God connecting people with people and people with Jesus. We find our potential on Jesus’ pathway where we celebrate the people we meet and the memories we create; it is his story we live. We live Jesus beyond our church building so that, daily, heaven and earth meet.” Note the incarnational tones and how finding our potential on Jesus’ pathway moves us towards Christian perfection, which is being made perfect in love of God and neighbor.

Vision helps us to stay on mission. Pastors and church leaders must always beat this drum, and the rhythm of this beat looks like continually growing spiritually, imagining the future, and asking how does this accomplish our mission and vision? How does it connect people with people? How does it connect people with Jesus Christ? How does it tell his story?

Reflection: Missional Ecclesiology

While the mission field is as close as our own backyards, the problem with many backyards is that they are often more private and even fenced off. The automatic garage door opener is an invention that began to destroy neighborhood relationships and

¹¹⁴ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 68.

community. People can now leave and return home and never even have to see, much less speak to, their neighbors. So, perhaps the mission field should be as close as our own front yards. Perhaps it is time to open the garage door more often and move the grill and the yard games around front. Perhaps the first step towards being missional is just sitting on the front porch or being in the front yard more.

Rankin's connecting of John Wesley's missional ecclesiology to Christian perfection resonates deeply, as does Newbigin's work helping followers of Christ to recover a missionary Church. I had several conversations with a newcomer in a previous church that were both energizing and raised cause for concern. This person was a passionate follower of Christ, bold, theologically charismatic, and they knew Scripture well. However, they also had a history of "church hopping" and boldly asserting themselves. To their credit, they realized they often come across as too harsh and aggressive. When they asked how they could best support my vision, I suggested slowing down and focusing more on character, specifically in reference to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and Paul's words on the meaninglessness of the gifts of the Spirit if we do not have love (1 Cor. 13).

They responded with both understanding and disappointment because it was not what they had hoped for, but they respected my leadership and authority as the pastor. Unfortunately, after exchanging several emails, I did not see them again after our meeting. They mentioned how we could return to this conversation about how they can support my vision when we were both more Christ-like. I realized in our continued but short-lived conversations, and through this research, that this really is the vision. Becoming more like Christ, or better yet, becoming "little Christs," is the essence of

missional ecclesiology. Missional ecclesiology centers on God's mission to see us grow in Christian maturity and to seek to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ and help others do the same.

In another appointment where I served as associate pastor, a well-meaning parishioner asked why my senior pastor and I were always talking about reaching new people. They also asked, "What about those of us who are already here?" In many ways, I cannot really blame them. The Church has become another source of goods and services to be consumed. In its missional drift, the Church has allowed the professionalization of clergy and other church staff to eclipse the priesthood and mission of all people, essentially saying, "We are professionals; do not try this at home." However, home, work, school, and other places where we spend time, are exactly where Christians should be participants in God's mission. The Church has much work to do. So, what about those already in church? They need to join the mission of the Church rather than remain within the walls of the church building.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

When I transitioned from youth ministry to pastoral ministry, my first appointment was to a church in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, which is one of the largest gated communities in the United States. While persons of all ages live there, “the Village” has been branded a retirement community. People in the congregation that I served often joked that the youth group was anyone under sixty years old. While humorous, they actually took this idea to heart and sought to be intentionally intergenerational. The small youth group often helped lead worship; several youth and young adults were a regular part of the praise team and the youth often did special worship services like the Good Friday service. The youth hosted an intergenerational “youth group” meeting where older adults brought cookies in exchange for help with their electronic devices. They also hosted and organized a “feed the funnel” party with the Pack Shack¹ where the entire church had a brief worship service, followed by making rice-based meal packets together for area food pantries and people in need.

Furthermore, my position itself was part of their experiment to be a contextual learning environment for young people experiencing a call to ministry. Although I was no longer a young adult, and already had ministry experience, they offered me an associate

¹ <https://thepackshack.org>

pastor fellowship position while I was in seminary and going through the ordination process. I learned many great lessons while there and continued to develop my passion for intergenerational mission and ministry.

Based on this and other experiences, this interdisciplinary chapter engages sociology and the theory of intergenerational dynamics in the workplace. This foundational research directly relates to this project to help the Church intentionally develop intergenerational relationships towards a missional vitality. This research will explore how some best practices in the workplace may translate well to best practices in the Church as it lives out God's mission. It will also show how intergenerational dynamics and generational differences in the workplace interact with and shape the biblical, historical, and theological foundations as well as the project problem, hypothesis, and the project itself.

Sociology and Intergenerational Dynamics in the Workplace

Sociology is the broad field that is foundational to this project and is defined as "the study of social life, social change, and the causes and consequences of human behavior" collectively, according to the American Sociological Association.² Norbert Elias says that "sociology is concerned with problems of society, and society is formed by oneself and other people together," acknowledging that the person who studies society is part of it.³ This is relevant to this project since both the Church and the workplace are societies and part of society. Churches and workplaces have a social life, experience

² "What Is Sociology?" American Sociological Association, <https://www.asanet.org/about/what-is-sociology/>.

³ Norbert Elias, *What Is Sociology?* (Taylors, SC: Hutchinson & Co. Publishers Ltd, 1978), 13.

social change, and affect human behavior, and they are part of these areas within broader society. The Church and most workplaces are also concerned with problems of society, within and outside themselves, and are formed by individuals coming together.

The narrower theory within sociology that is foundational to this project is intergenerational dynamics in the workplace. Geoffrey Talmon and others define the theory of intergenerational dynamics as “an examination of how differences in generations’ perspectives, preferences, and expectations impact how individuals interact.”⁴ Regarding word choice, ‘intergenerational’ involves interaction between generational cohorts, while ‘multigenerational’ simply means that persons from multiple generations are present, whether or not they interact. This chapter and the entire project is concerned with the former—the desire is to be intentionally intergenerational.

This foundational interdisciplinary research is primarily a critical analysis of two contrasting views regarding intergenerational dynamics, namely one held by Haydn Shaw and the other promoted by Bobby Duffy. On the one hand, in *Sticking Points*, Shaw considers how to get five generations to work together instead of against one another.⁵ On the other hand, in *The Generations Myth*, Duffy considers that when a person is born does not matter as much as where a person is born and other factors.⁶ Shaw argues that a generational sticking point is “when people from different generations answer the same

⁴ Geoffrey A. Talmon et al., “Teaching About Intergenerational Dynamics: An Exploratory Study of Perceptions and Prevalence in US Medical Schools,” *Advances in medical education and practice* 13 (January 2022): 113, <https://doi:10.2147/AMEP.S329523>.

⁵ Haydn Shaw, *Sticking Points: How to Get 5 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020).

⁶ Bobby Duffy, *The Generation Myth: Why When You’re Born Matters Less Than You Think* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2021), 29.

question differently and assume their answer should be obvious to everyone else.”⁷

Meanwhile, Duffy asserts, “although it is possible to learn something valuable about ourselves by studying generational dynamics, we will not learn these lessons from a mixture of manufactured conflicts and tiresome clichés.” These differences are often based on lazy thinking at best and useless or dangerous stereotypes at worst.

Duffy admits that broken economic trends and connections between the young and old, for example, make generational analysis one important factor to consider.⁸ His argument is that people need to better understand what shapes us individually and as a society and that “the generations we were born into is merely one important part of the story,” in addition to other factors like individual life cycles and the impact of historical events.⁹ Interestingly, intergenerational relationships themselves are among the factors that account for generational differences. This is part of the problem for Duffy because analysis often “confuses age with generation and stereotypes both the old and the young.”¹⁰ While Shaw agrees that “putting people into categories is stereotyping,” he suggests that “using generalizations is helpful.” He admits that the comparisons he makes “describe large numbers of people but fail to predict or explain any one individual.”¹¹ This is more broadly true of sociology too, which can help us describe large numbers of people or societies, but falls short in decoding individuals that make up these societies.

⁷ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 5.

⁸ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 13.

⁹ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 58.

¹⁰ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 20.

¹¹ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 57.

Shaw notes several key points that are important to this discussion that can be used as an outline for this conversation. (1) There are now up to five generations in the workplace, and “these generations might as well be from different countries, so different are their cultural styles and preferences.” (2) Shaw suggests an organizational leadership approach to blending the generations. (3) “Focusing on the ‘what’ escalates tensions, while focusing on the ‘why’ pulls teams together.” (4) Knowing where teams get stuck can “allow teams to label tension points and work through them.” (5) Implementing “cross-generational leadership can lead to empowering, not losing, people.”

Moreover, Shaw optimistically adds that “the same generational conflicts that get teams stuck can cause them to stick together,” and instead of becoming a problem to be solved, they can become opportunities to be leveraged and “catalysts for deeper conversations … understanding and appreciation.”¹² The real problem this project addresses, as Duffy notes, is not “warfare between generations but a growing separation between the young and old” due to many other factors besides just when a person is born.¹³ Therefore, learning to have these conversations among the generations is a central component to this project and research.

Five Generational Cohorts and Their Characteristics

There are now five living generations (a sixth generation is already emerging) and each are represented, to some degree, in the workplace; most of recorded history only had three living generations. Shaw notes three key reasons: (1) longer life spans, (2) advances

¹² Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 6, 8.

¹³ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 9.

in technology and information, and (3) consumer culture. Technological and informational advances have allowed younger persons to contribute to society and enter the workplace far earlier than their predecessors, who had to “wait their turn.” At the same time, while there is some truth to the maxim that children today grow up too fast, by way of contrast, “adolescence is lengthening” and “high school graduation doesn’t mark a definitive transition into adulthood anymore” but into a new phase called “emerging adulthood.”¹⁴ In other words, while young people today may be entering the workplace earlier, they may also still be living with their parents as they make a more gradual transition into full-fledged adulthood.

Additionally, culture has also made consumers of the four younger generations far quicker than previous generations,¹⁵ which is evident in society’s prevalent producer-consumer mentality. While Duffy cautions against assuming change is happening quicker now, he notes that “the speed of adoption of and the reach achieved by modern technologies,” namely the smartphone, “have had a qualitatively different impact” than previous technologies.¹⁶ The fact that many people have supercomputers in their pockets now, in the form of smart phones, is just one among many factors why Duffy is mistaken; change is happening at a quickening pace.

Shaw and Duffy generally agree on terms for the five generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Shaw says that “age cohort

¹⁴ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, Location 93, Kindle.

¹⁵ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 19–21.

¹⁶ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 12; he notes how the smartphone took just thirteen years to be in most of our pockets; see also D. Comin and M. Mestieri, “Technology Diffusion: Measurement, Causes, and Consequences,” NBER working paper no. 19052 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economics Research, 2013), <https://nber.org/papers/w19052>.

groups are determined more by the way a generation buys, votes, and answers surveys than by historical markers or birth curves,” and there is no easily identifiable date for when one generation ends and another begins. “Cuspers,” a term developed by marketers for persons who share characteristics of two generations and were born somewhere between, may uniquely “serve as translators and negotiators between generations” since they often have a foot in both. Edwin Friedman illustrates the natural flow from one generation to the next,

Life’s connection between generations, therefore, is not a rebounding, linear, billiard-ball phenomenon but more like an infinitely long collapsing telescope in which each generation overlaps and to some extent shapes the next “cylinder of time.” Life has evolved not in terms of the way the past has an impact on the present, but in terms of the way the past is present in the present.¹⁷

The five generations by dates are (1) Traditionalists—born before 1945; (2) Baby Boomers—born 1946–1964; (3) Gen Xers—born 1965–1980; (4) Millennials—born 1981–1998; and (5) Gen Z—born 1999–2019.¹⁸ These are the terms used in this research.

While Duffy concurs with these common identifiers for generational cohorts, he also suggests that they are arbitrary and may actually help to manufacture “a multitude of generational differences,” even going so far as to call them “fake differences.” He says this is largely due to a multimillion dollar “generations industry” where researchers are encouraged to “reduce vast swatches of the population to a handful of characteristics and behavior.”¹⁹ Again, while unfair stereotypes should be avoided, using generalizations can

¹⁷ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 2007), 220.

¹⁸ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 9.

¹⁹ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 14; elsewhere his snarky tone is at least entertaining: “If companies have a problem with the motivation and retention of younger or older people, they should look to themselves rather than to magic answers based on astrological thinking. It seems bizarre that the

be somewhat helpful. The following, compiled by Purdue University Global,²⁰ describes characteristics of these generational cohorts in more detail.

Traditionalists make up just 2% of the current U.S. workforce and are described as dependable, straightforward, tactful, and loyal. They were shaped by events like the Great Depression, World War II, and early radio and movies. They are motivated by respect, recognition, and providing long-term value to the company. Their preferred communication style is personal touch and handwritten notes instead of email. Their worldview stresses obedience over individualism; age equals seniority; and advancement through hierarchy. They want satisfying work, opportunities to contribute, and stability.

Baby Boomers make up 25% of the current U.S. workforce and are described as optimistic, competitive, workaholics, and team-oriented. They were shaped by events like the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and Watergate. They are motivated by company loyalty, teamwork, and duty. Their preferred communication style is whatever is most efficient, including phone calls and face-to-face. Their worldview stresses sacrificing for others and that achievement comes after paying one's dues. They want employers to provide specific goals and deadlines, put them in mentor roles, and offer coaching-style feedback. 65% of Baby Boomers intend to work past age 65, and 10,000 of them reach retirement age every day.

At the same time, “a greater portion of older individuals are staying in or entering the workplace.”²¹ While they are planning for retirement, many Boomers are staying in

workplace has been the context for the frothiest generational claims—it’s almost as if there’s money to be made in fabricating and then troubleshooting generational challenges,” 93–94.

²⁰ “Generational Differences in the Workplace,” Purdue University Global, <https://www.purdueglobal.edu/education-partnerships/generational-workforce-differences-infographic/>.

²¹ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 83.

the workplace longer and delaying their retirement. Karen Fingerman and others note that many Baby Boomers are also in the unique position of needing to care for aging parents, tend to children who are still at home, or assist adult children, or fill all three roles, as a “sandwich generation.”²² This means that many Boomers are already somewhat versed in intergenerational interactions from a familial perspective.

Generation X makes up 33% of the current U.S. workforce and are described as flexible, informal, skeptical, and independent. They were shaped by events like the AIDS epidemic, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the dot-com boom. They are motivated by diversity, work-life balance, and their personal-professional growth. Their preferred style of communication is whatever is most efficient, including phone calls and face-to-face. Their worldview favors diversity, being quick to move on if employers fail to meet their needs, and being resistant to change at work if it affects their personal lives. They want immediate feedback, flexible work arrangements and work-life balance, and extended opportunities for personal advancement. Gen Xers make up the highest percentage of business startup founders at 55%, and they will outnumber Baby Boomers by 2028.

Millennials now make up the largest part of the current U.S. workforce at 35% and are described as competitive, civic- and open-minded on diversity, and achievement-oriented. They were shaped by events like Columbine, 9/11, and the internet. They are motivated by responsibility, quality managers, and unique work experiences. Their preferred communication style is instant messages, texts, and email. Their worldview stresses desires for challenge, growth, and development. They want a fun work

²² Karen L. Fingerman et al, “The Baby Boomers’ Intergenerational Relationships,” *The Gerontologist* 52, no. 2 (January 2012), 199–200, <https://doi:10.1093/geront/gnr139>.

environment and healthy work-life balance. They are likely to leave an organization if they disagree with change. They want employers to get to know them, manage by results, be flexible on schedule and work assignments, and provide immediate feedback. They will comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025. About 15% of Millennials ages 25–35 live at home with their parents. While older Generation Zers are just now old enough to enter the workforce, according to Madalina Radulescu and others and U.S. labor force demographic data, the proportion of Millennial employees is rapidly increasing.²³

Generation Z makes up just 5% of the current U.S. workforce and is described as global, entrepreneurial, progressive, and less focused. They are shaped by events like life after 9/11, the Great Recession, and access to technology from a young age. They are motivated by diversity, personalization, individuality, and creativity. Their preferred communication style is instant messaging, texts, and social media. Their worldview stresses self-identifying as digital device addicts; valuing independence and individuality; and they prefer Millennial managers, innovative coworkers, and new technologies. They want employers to offer opportunities to work on multiple projects at once, provide work-life balance, and allow them to be self-directed and independent. 40% of them want to interact with their boss at least daily, and 84% expect formal training from employers.

While it is important to mention that there are some similarities, it also must be noted that the generational experience in the U.S. has been decidedly different for African-Americans and other people of color. The root of endemic racism in this nation stems from the belief that “Black people were not merely enslaved but a slave race,” says

²³ Madalina Radulescu et al, “Intergenerational Gap Dynamics,” Proceedings of the 12th International Conference of Business Excellence (2018): 829–831, <https://doi:10.2478/picbe-2018-0074>; see also <https://www.bls.gov/emp/emplab1.htm>.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, a belief “we cannot purge from this nation today.”²⁴ She also powerfully notes, “More than any other group in this country’s history, [Black Americans] have served, generation after generation in an overlooked but vital role: it is we who have been the perfecter of this democracy.” Even more boldly, Hannah Jones says, “the United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie.”²⁵ That ideal and lie is that “all men are created equal,” not Black men or women, or women at all, for that matter. The plight of the oppressed helped the U.S. to change as a nation, but there is still much work to do, making intersectionality more than just a consideration for this project. While this project is concerned primarily with an intergenerational Church, there is also much work to be done to create a multicultural and multiethnic Church.

Organizational Approaches to Blending Generations

Shaw suggests that there are essentially four approaches to working with the five generations: (1) ignore them, (2) fix them, (3) cut a deal with them, or (4) lead them, that last of which is the only approach that actually works well consistently.²⁶ Taken in turn, it is easiest to ignore a generation when it first enters the workplace because there are so few of them, and they “tend to adapt to the dress, communication styles, and approaches of other generations.”²⁷ This strategy is not good long-term, since there will eventually be too many of them to ignore as more of them enter the workforce, and members of older

²⁴ Nikole Hannah-Jones and New York Times Company, eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, first edition (New York, NY: One World, 2021), 22.

²⁵ Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 10.

²⁶ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 26–33.

²⁷ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 26.

generations leave. It also does not intentionally mentor younger generations to replace the older generations and show that they are even valued.

The second approach, fixing, comes with the stigma that something or someone is broken or wrong. Shaw says some organizations like to brag about their training programs for Millennials, which is fine “if the programs help them understand customers and employees of different generations.” If it is one-sided, and other generations are not also learning about Millennials, he questions the motivations of the program, which is often to get Millennials to behave more like older generations. He accurately notes that fixing can go both directions; 77% of Gen Zs say they prefer Millennial managers to older managers, and most people resent being fixed. It is really a waste of time trying to fix a problem when most think there is nothing wrong.²⁸ This is a major point of contention among generational cohorts in the workplace.

“Cutting a deal” begins when half of a new generation enters the workplace and the power dynamic starts to shift. To some degree, “every new generation negotiates a deal with their elders,”²⁹ and some negotiation is appropriate. Shaw notes how,

Traditionalists fought casual, and now most workplaces no longer require the tie and jacket. Boomers worked long hours and relocated, and today we take for granted that candidates have to talk job offers over at home before they can give an answer on relocation.

Now “thousands of Boomers and Gen Xers will fight adjusting to the more networked and causal style of Millennials,” and cutting deals was and is part of it. “The problem

²⁸ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 26–27.

²⁹ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 30.

with cutting deals is that you can't do it with all five generations at once" and still please everyone.³⁰ So, Shaw argues for generational leadership over management.

The first three approaches—ignoring, fixing, and cutting a deal—are actually management approaches. Nikita Duggal defines leadership as “the creation of positive, non-incremental change through meticulous planning, vision, and strategy” as well as “workforce empowerment and adaptive decision-making,” while management is more about control and instructing subordinates to regularly perform tasks.³¹ Shaw notes that “the Boomers were the last generation that responded to management,” while Boomers and younger generations respond better to leadership. Boomers just “learned early on to function with management.”³² Leadership is about vision-casting, empowering, and inspiring people and change, as opposed to people, resource, and task management, which is certainly a necessary component of leadership but just one of the components.

Most importantly, “leaders love their people,” says Shaw. “If we love people, we won’t try to change them, and we can’t quit trying to change them until we appreciate them, and we can’t appreciate them until we understand them.”³³ This assessment intersects with Duggal’s definitions of leadership and management, since we cannot change people. We can only empower and inspire change as we seek to understand and accept others. Organizational approaches to blending generations are either management or leadership approaches; leadership is what most people prefer and respond to.

³⁰ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 31.

³¹ Nikita Duggal, “Leadership vs. Management: Understanding the Key Difference,” Business and Leadership, Simplilearn, last modified March 10, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p9cnt95>.

³² Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 32.

³³ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 32.

Focusing on Why Instead of What

Shaw says that it is clear that “the younger generations will bring change, and smart organizations don’t fight what they can’t stop.”³⁴ Instead, they seek to understand, appreciate, and even leverage generational differences by focusing on “why” instead of “what.” In this regard, Shaw references the historical events, or “ghost stories,” that shape us. “Historical events are like ghosts—their impact lingers long after the events are over,” and they help us to understand one another. Each generation has moments of “I remember what I was doing (or where I was) when/on...” Pearl Harbor was attacked, Kennedy was assassinated, the moon landing, 9/11, etc. “These stories help us make sense of momentous events and explain who we are today and why.”³⁵ These stories also include the more personal events like memories and important births and deaths, etc.

Ghost stories shape our “values, worldview, and definitions of success,” as well as shared experiences across generational cohorts. “We won’t appreciate another generation until we understand their ghost stories,” Shaw says, and “telling ghost stories helps get five generations working together.”³⁶ While space does not permit a fuller discussion, Shaw examines key events for each of the generational cohorts that help us understand each other and work through sticking points.

³⁴ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 21.

³⁵ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 53.

³⁶ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 54.

Again, Duffy stresses that many factors affect generational differences and interactions. He notes what I would call “shared ghost stories” that contribute to certain “attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of a society [which] can change in a consistent way across age groups,” such as “a pandemic, war, or economic crisis.”³⁷ Patricia Vendramin concurs by saying that “a generation cannot be defined only by reference to a cultural dimension,” rather, “it is a specific combination of cultural, economic, [and] historical-political dimensions.”³⁸ Duffy says that “people also change as they age or as a result of major life events such as leaving home, having children, or retiring.” Generations may also differ “because they were socialized in different conditions from those of other generations, and thus remain distinct from other cohorts even as they age.” Every change can be explained by a combination of effects, and Duffy rightly notes the animosity young and old have had towards one another to some degree. For older generations in particular, this may even resemble “waves of moral panic,”³⁹ as if their traditions were being rejected outright, rather than just changing over time.

To help avoid this panic and to dismantle unfair stereotypes, instead of reinforcing them, people need to stop talking down to/about one another, i.e., “Kids these days,” Gen X “slackers,” and “Okay, Boomer,” etc. While “every generation blames the one before,” according to British pop rock band Mike + the Mechanics,⁴⁰ Duffy rightly

³⁷ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 16.

³⁸ Patricia Vendramin, “Age Diversity and Intergenerational Relations in the Workplace,” 4th Conference of Young People & Societies in Europe and around the Mediterranean, *Forli*, 26 27 28 (March 2009), 1.

³⁹ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 17-21.

⁴⁰ “The Living Years,” Track A, Mike + the Mechanics, *Living Years*, Atlantic WEA, U.K. U 7717, 1988, 7” vinyl.

notes that every generation holds a “rosy retrospection” with regard to their own past, thinking that it was better than it really was and forgetting “the bad habits” and “dodgy behavior of their own youth.”⁴¹ The good old days were really not always good or bad. Additionally, we tend to have “a deep desire for our children to do better than we did, and we’ve become accustomed to guaranteed generation-on-generation progress across society as a whole.”⁴² This is no longer guaranteed with economic and other struggles.

Conversely, there is more to work involvement than just economics. Vendramin notes the concept of “work orientation” where persons have various relationships to, or motivation for, involvement in work, in addition to the pragmatic dimension of work to meet personal and family needs. While some work to live and others live to work, “orientation here means the norms the individual has internalized during his/her life course and that s/he applies to the relevant areas of his/her regular daily life (family, leisure and work, etc.).” Common concerns for individuals across generations are work-life balance and making a contribution to society. Vendramin says that “opportunities for self-development, knowledge acquisition, interest in the work content, feelings of success, autonomy and social usefulness”⁴³ are important to most workers of any age.

Another key “why” in relation to “what” is that “youth are largely isolated from non-family adults—spatially, socially, and psychologically—in almost all spheres of United States society,” according to Shepherd Zeldin and others. From preschool to high school/college graduation, children and young people are mostly with peers, and few

⁴¹ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 21.

⁴² Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 31.

⁴³ Vendramin, “Age Diversity,” 2.

adults, in school and other programs. However, “strong relationships between youth and adults serve protective and developmental functions” and “can help prevent youth from engaging in problem behaviors [and] help promote knowledge, competency, and initiative among youth.”⁴⁴ The minimal meaningful interactions youth have with a variety of adults is a key problem when it comes to working through differences.

Naming and Working Through Sticking Points

While space does not permit a fuller discussion of each, the sticking points Shaw identifies that come up frequently in organizations are communication, decision-making, dress code, feedback, fun at work, knowledge transfer, loyalty, meetings, policies, respect, training, and work ethic. Like visiting another country or culture when we can only be native to one, “our own generation will always feel like home. But that doesn’t mean we can’t visit other cultures and learn to appreciate them and speak their language.”⁴⁵ Shaw also notes that people all have the same basic needs that they may try to meet differently. When people are stuck, “emotions escalate, and people forget that they have far more similarities than differences.”⁴⁶ Learning this can help us get out of places of stuck-ness.

On the other hand, Duffy makes a bold but incorrect assertion that virtually no generational differences actually exist in the workplace.⁴⁷ As noted previously, he

⁴⁴ Shepherd Zeldin, Reed Larson, Linda Camino, and Cailin O’Connor, “Intergenerational Relationships and Partnerships in Community Programs: Purpose Practice, and Directions for Research, *Journal of Community Psychology* 33, no. 1 (2005), 1–2.

⁴⁵ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 25.

⁴⁶ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 41.

⁴⁷ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 92.

believes differences are largely fabricated. An analysis by the *Journal of Business and Psychology* notes that “the pattern of results indicates that the relationships between generational membership and work-related outcomes are moderate to small, essentially zero in many cases,”⁴⁸ but it is not zero. Regardless of degrees of difference, individuals and groups must find common ground to work together to address sticking points.

Naming and working through sticking points requires decoding, according to Shaw. To lead through stuck-ness, “you must be able to decode what the generations mean—and don’t mean … when they say or do things that seem strange.”⁴⁹ Duffy admits that “today’s generations live increasingly separate lives in distinct physical and digital spaces, allowing deeper misperceptions and stereotypes,”⁵⁰ making it all the more important to name and work through sticking points and stereotypes. Duffy suggests,

There are just three explanations for how all attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors change over time—period, life-cycle, and cohort effects. By studying how these three effects individually and collectively shape us, we can develop a powerful new understanding of how and why societies are changing, and much greater ability to predict what comes next on the biggest issues of our times.⁵¹

In contrast with Duffy’s incorrect assertion that generational differences do not really exist in the workplace, Vendramin suggests that “managing age diversity at work, rather than reinforcing age segregation … can support knowledge transmission in both

⁴⁸ D.P. Costanza, J.M. Badger, R.L. Fraser, J.B. Severt, and P.A. Gade, “Generational Differences in Work-Related Attitudes: A Meta-analysis,” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 27, no. 4 (2012), 375–394, www.jstor.org/stable/41682990?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

⁴⁹ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 147.

⁵⁰ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 13.

⁵¹ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 16.

directions, mutual recognition and trust, and ... social cohesion.”⁵² Again, leadership is preferable to management; people do not want to be managed, but they do want to be led.

Implementing Cross-Generational Leadership

Shaw makes the important distinction that knowing what sticking points are is not the same as knowing what to do about them.⁵³ This is why process is important to implementing cross-generational leadership. He would likely agree with the adage attributed to Coach Vince Lombardi that leaders are not born, they are made.⁵⁴ Shaw suggests a five-step process for implementing leadership cross-generationally:

- (1) Acknowledge: Talk about generational differences.
- (2) Appreciate: Focus on the “why,” not the “what,” and the common needs.
- (3) Flex: Agree on how to accommodate different approaches.
- (4) Leverage: Maximize the strengths of each generation.
- (5) Resolve: Determine which option will yield the best results.⁵⁵

In more detail, acknowledging the generational difference is another way of naming it to work through it. Next, while redirecting from “what” to “why” takes practice, showing appreciation for the difference “keeps generations talking instead of fighting.”⁵⁶ Flexing is about flexibility with generational preferences while “anything that will make you lose

⁵² Vendramin, “Age Diversity,” 8.

⁵³ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 38-39; associated questions: (1) Communication: What is the best way to interact with my coworkers? (2) Decision-making: How do we decide what to do? (3) Dress code: How casually can I dress? (4) Feedback: How often and in what ways do I want input? (5) Fun: How much fun at work is allowed? (6) Knowledge transfer: How do we pass on critical knowledge to employees? (7) Loyalty: When is it okay to move on? (8) Meetings: What should happen in our meetings? (9) Policies: Are policies rules or guidelines? (10) Respect: How do I get others to respect me? (11) Training: How do I learn best? (12) Work ethic: How many hours are required, and when must I work them?

⁵⁴ Attributed to well-known football coach Vince Lombardi.

⁵⁵ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 40.

⁵⁶ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 41.

your foot, customer, money, or funding” is non-negotiable. In other words, the top priorities for most workplaces are safety, customer service, profit, and financial responsibility; almost everything else is just a preference.⁵⁷ Therefore, “smart organizations listen when the different generations help them see that they are losing money because they have mixed up business necessities with generational preferences.”⁵⁸ This is understandable since most people would say they like what they like.

“Maximizing differences produces leverage” where one person’s (or generation’s) strength makes up for another’s weakness, while “cutting a deal produces a compromise.” This recognizes and leverages the strengths of each generation instead of focusing on irritations.⁵⁹ Finally, since flexing does not solve most problems, teams must decide how to move forward when all preferences cannot be accommodated.⁶⁰ This is important for workplaces and other groups, according to Zeldin and others, because they “derive benefits when youth and adults work collaboratively toward a common cause.”⁶¹ Having a process for working through generational differences makes a difference.

Intergenerational Dynamics and Biblical, Historical, and Theological Foundations

To summarize previous chapters, the biblical foundation of this research is 1 Tim. 4:11–16, where Paul encourages his protégé, a young Timothy, not to let anyone in the church at Ephesus look down on him because of his age, but to be an example to the

⁵⁷ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 43–44.

⁵⁸ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 45

⁵⁹ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 46–47.

⁶⁰ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 48.

⁶¹ Zeldin, Larson, Camino, and O’Connor, “Intergenerational Relationships,” 2.

believers instead (4:12). The historical foundation of this project is Susanna Wesley, mother and mentor of John and Charles Wesley and their siblings. The theological foundation is missional ecclesiology, largely based on the work of Lesslie Newbigin, where the mission of the Church is really the mission of God. This research turns to how intergenerational dynamics in the workplace interact with these areas before turning to implications for the project, problem, and hypothesis. What follows is the interaction of these three foundational chapters with intergenerational dynamics in the workplace through a sociological lens.

Biblical Foundation: 1 Timothy 4:11–16

Paul's explicit mention of Timothy's age indicates that he was part of a younger generation than Paul and many of the members of the Ephesian church. Paul was clearly making a case for intergenerational relationships in his instructions to Timothy as the faith was being passed from the first to the second generation of the Church. Due to shorter life expectancies and earlier childbearing, it is unclear how many generations were alive at the same time in the early first century. However, Timothy had a relationship with his mother Eunice and may have had one with his grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). While it is also unclear what the generational differences were, it is apparent that Timothy and members of the church at Ephesus indeed had generational differences and needed to better understand and appreciate one another in light of them.

Since this interdisciplinary research considers intergenerational dynamics in the workplace, it is worth noting that, while some may have been able to leave their professions to follow Jesus, most had to live out their faith and calling in this specific

context while also making ends meet. While it is not certain what Timothy's work was, Paul was a tentmaker—bi-vocational after a fashion. This coincides with Paul's clear leadership, rather than managerial, approach to his relationship with Timothy. Their relationship was intergenerational and familial: a mentor-apprentice and spiritual father-son relationship. As noted, Paul even uses the example of Timothy's own family to encourage him: "I am reminded of your sincere faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (2 Tim. 1:5).

While Paul gives him tasks (management) as a leader, his instructions are far more concerned with Timothy's character and example (leadership). Paul inspired, empowered, encouraged, and even confronted those to whom he wrote. His letters to Timothy were no exception as seen by how he encouraged Timothy and addressed his self-doubt about his leadership in the Ephesian church. In turn, Timothy was also to inspire and encourage others by his example as well as confront and dismantle unfair stereotypes between himself/his generation and older church members/their generation.

Timothy was either being looked down on because of his age, because he had self-doubt regarding his leadership, or both. This is why Paul needed to urge Timothy not to allow this and to assert his leadership by example. This also further encouraged the Ephesian church not to look down on Timothy. It is mostly just guesswork as to what events or generational "ghost stories" shaped Timothy and the members of the church at Ephesus. Events that shaped most new Christians in this era were the stories of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost; and the growth of the Church in the known world. Paul's epistles, especially to Timothy and the Ephesians, shaped individuals, the community, and the early Church as a whole. Paul is

an example of an older adult engaged in intentional learning with Timothy, his young adult protégé, as Timothy experienced symbiotic and collaborative relationships and discipleship with the church at Ephesus. Obviously, just as there are intergenerational dynamics in the workplace, there were and are intergenerational dynamics in the Church.

Historical Foundation: Susanna Wesley

Susanna Wesley took great care to educate and mentor her children, including religious education and spiritual nurturing, both in groups and individually. Two of her children in particular, John and Charles, became the founders of the Methodist movement, making her the mother of the Methodist movement. Susanna engaged intentionally in intergenerational relationships with her children and adults in the Epworth rectory and, therefore, more broadly, the next generation of the Church.

Susanna ran a strict household, no doubt based on her own strict upbringing and self-discipline. Her methods with her children seem to have been both austere leadership and managerial in nature. This appears to have affected John Wesley's methodical approach, e.g., the Methodist movement, as he sought to renew the Church. On the one hand, Methodism could be seen as a managerial approach, reducing aspects of the Christian life to mere tasks to be managed. However, as a methodical approach, faith-building tasks require management, while people require leadership. This is one of the key strengths of the Methodist movement and the Wesleyan tradition: methods that, when well-managed, lead people towards Christ and growth in the Holy Spirit.

Susanna Wesley was no stranger to loss, death, and trials. It may be too apropos to refer to the events that shaped her as "ghost stories," having lost several children and

struggling in marriage and ministry. They nearly lost John in the famous rectory fire, a key event that shaped Susanna and John, especially. From Samuel and Mary Annesley, to Samuel and Susanna Wesley, to John and Charles and the other Wesley children, Susanna's story is a multigenerational. She was ahead of her time regarding women and girls, being well-educated, although self-taught. This undoubtedly influenced John to include women in ministry. These events shaped individuals and directly and indirectly shaped the intergenerational Methodist movement.

While children certainly had their place in her day, Susanna did not look down on them but expected a great deal from them. They were to develop age-appropriately and master learning in faith, Scripture, good works, and their own self-discipline. Her Sunday evening prayers in the Epworth rectory, no doubt, shaped John's work on society, band, and class meetings. Her "epistles," manuals, and handbooks on Christian doctrine written for her children also shaped John and the early Methodist movement. Her influence helped her sons remain part of the established Church while also calling for its revival.

Susanna is an example of an adult engaging in intentional learning with her children as they became young adults and experiencing symbiotic and collaborative relationships and discipleship together. Just as there are intergenerational dynamics in the workplace and the church, there are intergenerational dynamics at home, as was the case in the Wesley home.

Theological Foundation: Missional Ecclesiology

Missional ecclesiology concerns the mission of the Church and is closely related to other theological themes and issues, especially the missio Dei (mission of God) and

imago Dei (image of God). Since the mission of the Church is really the mission of God, and we are created in God's image to reflect God's character, it is important to note the unique expressions of God's image within individuals and generations. If the goal of missional ecclesiology is to reflect God's character, Christian perfection is a central theological theme, as it was for John Wesley. Christians are to be made perfect in love of God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–40) as conduits of sharing God's grace and character.

The priesthood of believers (1 Pet 2:9), or universal priesthood, as developed by Martin Luther, is also the priesthood of all ages and generations. Christians can really only follow the Spirit's leadership, who can change persons, and even generations, into a people that reflect God's character. In many ways, missional ecclesiology is already centered on the "why" instead of the "what" with regards to doctrinal and theological convictions. This connects with my working definition for missional ecclesiology, which identifies the Church as a community of Spirit-enabled and disciple-making missionaries engaged in God's transformation of lives, communities, and the world.

A review of Lesslie Newbigin's work shows that the Church has sadly lost a vital understanding and practice of missional ecclesiology as the Church has become largely insular, rather than looking outward. The missional ecclesiological conversation is primarily about reclaiming what is central to the Great Commission to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20). This is why the Fresh Expressions movement is a missional movement on the forefront of reclaiming our missional ecclesiology, where a blended ecology and symbiotic relationship is formed with the inherited forms of Church.

Salvation in Jesus Christ is not really an exit strategy from this world but more about being fully in it—seeking God's will on earth as it already is in heaven (Matt 6:10).

Salvation is also about healing, wholeness, holiness, restoration of relationships, restoration to community, justice and mercy in the world, and, of course, the Church's mission, which is really God's mission. In Christ, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, followers of Christ live incarnationally as the hands and voice of Jesus. Connecting mission and salvation, Gutiérrez boldly calls for a new ecclesiological perspective of "uncentering the Church, for the Church must cease considering itself as the exclusive place of salvation and orient itself towards a new and radical service of service." Instead, "the action of Christ and his Spirit is the true hinge of the plan of salvation."⁶² The Church is the Body of Christ that points people to Christ for salvation.

Theology is really a continuing conversation about God, what people believe (or do not believe) about God, and how that works out where people live, in their workplaces or schools, and otherwise spend time. While scholars and pastors may be "resident theologians," really anyone who believes something about God or has a conversation about God is practicing theology. Theology is not reserved for paid professionals. While leaders in the workplace and church may lead people towards more intentional intergenerational engagement, all have parts to play in these efforts. Older and younger adults who engage in intentional learning and conversations with one another will experience symbiotic and collaborative relationships in the workplace and the Church.

Conclusion

These concluding remarks summarize the research and synthesize the theory of intergenerational dynamics in the workplace through a sociological perspective as it

⁶² Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 130.

relates to mission and ministry implications that are foundational to this project. While there are generational differences in the workplace and the Church, these are due to many different factors in addition to when persons were born. There is also a lot of common ground; therefore, helping older and younger adults to find and foster common ground and to better understand and appreciate generational differences is central to this project. This will lead towards symbiotic relationships and strengthen missional vitality.

Synthesis

Paul Taylor writes about the complex challenges and opportunities of today, “As a people, we’re getting older, more unequal, more diverse, more mixed race, more digitally linked, more tolerant, less married, less religious, less mobile, and less confident.”⁶³ Intergenerational dynamics in the workplace relates to intergenerational dynamics in the Church and addresses some of Taylor’s concerns. Just as navigating generational dynamics in the workplace is largely concerned with leading people towards change and more cooperative endeavors, this project will also help lead people in the Church towards change, better understanding, and cooperation. The Church wants to lead people to Christ, and while change is not for us to manage, followers of Christ can help encourage, inspire, and empower others, offering the Spirit a canvas to work with. This is why listening to God and others’ stories is so central to Fresh Expressions.

Makungu Akinyela points out how this is central and often natural in many African-American Church traditions through the “testify’n ritual” when someone stands during worship music, singing trails off, and they begin to tell their story. As they do,

⁶³ Taylor, *The Next America*, 33.

there are responses like “Amen” or “Yes” or an affirmation of “That’s right,” which builds the confidence of the one sharing their testimony. Our stories connect with one another’s stories and the Jesus stories in what Akinyela refers as a “community construction of a preferred story” where “the witnesses have become full participants in the story.”⁶⁴ This project will create that kind of space for the Holy Spirit by including workshops and launching a specifically intergenerational Fresh Expression where these shared stories, which are already central to the African-American experience, can be told. While my context is primarily Caucasian, this project has implications and potential for multiethnic and multicultural possibilities in addition to intergenerational dynamics.

Shaw notes that “with five generations in the workplace and at home, sticking points are inevitable, but getting stuck is avoidable.” Even better, “the same generational conflicts that get teams stuck can cause teams to stick together.”⁶⁵ The vast majority of Christians throughout history have not been clergy or “ministry professionals.” Most people work in other professions and live out their faith within the context of the places where they live, work, learn, play, and spend time. Put another way, most people spend a majority of their time at home and work, their first and second places. Then they spend time at their third places—all the other spaces people gather, like restaurants, parks, bars, and coffee shops. Even the church is considered a third place.

This has implications for the project with regards to how pastors and church leaders only have a few hours a week with people, at best, while most of their time is

⁶⁴ Makungu M. Akinyela, “Testimony of Hope: African Centered Praxis for Therapeutic Ends,” *Journal of Systematic Therapies* 24, no. 1 (2005): 5-18, https://www.academos.edu/2324704/Testimony_of_hope_African_centered_praxis_for_therapeutic_ends.

⁶⁵ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 322.

spent at home and work. The Church must encourage and equip people for life in the neighborhood and workplace. This includes giving people tools in these spaces, like the Fresh Expression Journey, to help people listen to God and others, form relationships and build community people, explore discipleship together, and begin to form new Christian communities when people are ready.

There is a strong case to be made that age-segregated programming in the established Church either needs to end or be completely revamped. Many young people walk away from their faith and the Church because they were never actually a part of it, at least not much more than their youth groups or children's ministries. Many never experienced a community of faith where they were seen and heard as they were loved and mentored by a cadre of caring adults. Some were actively pushed into age-segregated programming; for example, many years ago in my context, a pastor did not want children in worship at all. This may be a contributing factor to why, as some long-time members of the church have shared, some of their adult children are no longer connected to any church and have entered the ranks of the "spiritual but not religious."

Shaw notes that because religious organizations "survive only if they are able to attract the next generation, this may be the most important issue they face because the younger generations are less interested in organized religion."⁶⁶ Duffy says that older generations "are more likely to attend regular religious service, with clear steps down, until we reach what looks like rock bottom with Millennials and Gen Z."⁶⁷ Fresh

⁶⁶ Shaw, *Sticking Points*, 16.

⁶⁷ Duffy, *The Generation Myth*, 18.

Expressions of Church are geared for just such a time as this, helping the inherited Church to reach people it would not otherwise reach. Mark DeYmaz rightly notes,

But what your community wants, what your city needs, and what a new generation (in spirit) is searching for is not an easy church to attend but an engaged church, one that reflects the entire community; effects spiritual, social, and financial transformation of neighborhoods in need; restores hope; engenders pride; and brings emotional uplift; this is, a church from which everyone benefits, not just those in a specific group.⁶⁸

In other words, people are not looking for the perfect church, which does not exist anyway, or the most exciting programming. Young people especially are looking for engaged churches that are making a difference where they can be themselves, ask questions, and have doubts.

Finally, it is important to note that the purpose of intergenerational relationships in the Church is relationships, not some other third thing. While Shaw argues that better intergenerational relationships will lead to better productivity, creativity, and other advantages in the workplace, in the Church, these would really be additional benefits to the centrality of relationships. Relationships are not built merely to accomplish something else. While there may be additional relational benefits, if people are in different places spiritually, or do not even come to follow Jesus at all, followers of Christ still love them and remain in relationship with them. Young people in particular can see right through disingenuous motives.

If our purpose for building intergenerational relationships is to grow the Church, ironically, it will most likely fail. Instead, Christians must trust that the Spirit is going to

⁶⁸ DeYmaz, *Disruption*, 45.

move and work through followers of Christ and that intergenerational relationships are good in and of themselves. At the same time younger generations seem less likely to connect from a place of duty than older generations. However, if they believe in a cause, they will often want to connect, i.e., younger generations are often not only asking for inclusion and justice for all people, they are often active in making these things a reality. Offering a compelling vision, like DeYmaz mentions, is far more likely to engage younger generations.

Reflection: Sociology and Intergenerational Dynamics

This research and project will help me be a better follower of Christ and pastor as well as father and son in my own most personal intergenerational relationships. Somewhat early in my transition to pastoral ministry, one of my mentors gave me feedback on my preaching, saying that he could definitely see my youth ministry background but to remember to preach to, and pastor, five generations. My prayer is to focus less on asking God to bless what we are doing and more on asking God to help us catch these waves and do what God is already blessing. Moynagh says, “The activity of this missional God means that the church does not engage in mission and ask God to bless it. God engages in mission and asks the church to join him,”⁶⁹ thereby supporting my fervent prayer for the Church.

⁶⁹ Moynagh, *Church in Life*, 145.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The previous chapters provided a foundation of biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary support to the project problem that many older and younger adults do not know how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission. This project described the state of decline and aging of the established Church in the United States as a whole and the United Methodist Church (UMC) in particular. It also described how the Christian faith and the Church are not being intentionally and effectively passed on to the next generation.

The hypothesis for this project anticipated that if older and younger adults participated together in an intentional intergenerational learning community about the Fresh Expressions Journey (FX Journey) and the blended ecology of Church, then they will form more understanding relationships across generational cohorts and be motivated to launch a Fresh Expression together. This intentional intergenerational engagement will directly help address the problem of Church decline and aging.

The foundation for this hypothesis developed through reflection on my personal experience from young to middle-aged adulthood, which was also marked by my transition from youth ministry to ordination as an elder in the UMC. The small church I in which I grew up allowed me to lead and preach as a teenager. This kind of trust to lead continued into my young adult years when I was married and became a member of the

UMC. I began to experience a call to minister as a pastor before answering that call by way of a ten year detour into youth ministry. This detour flavors my call now as clergy with continued passion for intergenerational mission and ministry. This includes helping the Church become more intentional about passing the faith and the Church itself to future generations.

The project context was Mishawaka First United Methodist Church (Mishawaka First) in the North District of Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church (INUMC). Mishawaka First is a congregation that mirrors the aging and decline of the UMC as a whole. However, their leadership has a desire to grow younger and become more intergenerational. I am the youngest lead pastor appointed to Mishawaka First in some time, and my passion for intergenerational mission and ministry, and expertise working with young people, was a key reason I was appointed to Mishawaka First.

This project, problem statement, and hypothesis were centered on a blended ecology model of Church towards intergenerational mission and ministry and the FX Journey. To review, the blended ecology “refers to Fresh Expressions of Church in symbiotic relationship with inherited forms of Church in a way that the combining of these attractional and missional modes blend to create a nascent form.”¹ The FX Journey consists of a series of six stages: (1) Listening to Understanding, (2) Forming Relationships, (3) Building Community, (4) Exploring Discipleship, (5) Church Taking Shape, and (6) Do It Again.² This project centered on the idea that Fresh Expressions should be critical components of the present and future Church and its renewal. If

¹ Beck, *Deep Roots Wild Branches*, 18.

² Luke Edwards, *Becoming Church: A Trail Guide for Starting Fresh Expressions* (Harrington Interactive Media LLC, 2021).

confirmed, the hypothesis and motivation of project participants will in turn motivate the broader Church towards more robust missional vitality.

My way of review, biblical support for this project was 1 Timothy 4:11-16, including a favorite verse for those who work with young people: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Paul’s instructions to Timothy, his young protégé and delegate to the Ephesian church, focused on both his character and leadership as a young pastor and the implication that Timothy’s elders should also respect and follow Timothy.

Pouring into and entrusting young leadership in this way is also historically supported by Susanna Wesley and her intentional, albeit regimented, way of engaging with her children. This included encouraging her son, a young John Wesley, in a similar fashion to how Paul’s instructed and encouraged his spiritual son Timothy. Susanna’s “kitchen prayer” sessions were also forerunners to Methodist structures—intentional learning communities like society, class, and band meetings. Beck, along with Jorge Acevedo, contend that Susanna pioneered the first “Fresh Expression” in her kitchen³ in connection with the blended ecology of Church. The Methodist movement that grew out of the Wesley home could also be considered a youth movement, just as it later grew as a young adult movement with John and Charles Wesley.

Fresh Expressions actually go back as far as the first century when people like Paul and Timothy met in temples and homes to worship and break bread together (Acts 2:46). By nature, this blended ecology of Church involves the established Church becoming more intentionally missional rather than insular. This work, then, is further

³ Beck with Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions*, 242, Kindle.

supported by the missional ecclesiological work of (1) John Wesley, as influenced by Susanna, (2) Martin Luther, and (3) more recently, Lesslie Newbigin. Engagement with John Wesley was primarily concerned with his work on Christian Perfection—that the goal of missional ecclesiology is to reclaim the Great Commandment to be made perfect in love of God and neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40). Christian Perfection, also known as entire sanctification or personal and social holiness, is not a set-apartness in terms of being insular, but for the good of the world that God loves (John 3:16). Martin Luther stresses the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9), of all ages and generations, as another important component of missional ecclesiology.

Sadly, the Church has largely lost its missional edge and a vital understanding and practice of missional ecclesiology; the conversation with Lesslie Newbigin was primarily focused on reclaiming the Great Commission to go and make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20) to reclaim a more robust missional ecclesiology. My working definition of missional ecclesiology identifies the Church as a community of Spirit-enabled disciple-making missionaries engaged in God's transformation of lives, communities, and the world.

Interdisciplinary support for this project was the theory of intergenerational dynamics in the work place through a sociological perspective. This relates directly to because there are intergenerational dynamics in both the workplace and the Church, especially for those who wish to reclaim a missional ecclesiology that is also intentionally intergenerational. Finding common ground is vital, it was central to this project, and it will lead towards symbiotic relationships and strengthened missional vitality. At the same time, intentionally building on differences can actually strengthen an intergenerational group rather than unintentionally leaving it stuck.

To synthesize the ministry focus and historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundational research that undergirded this work: an intentional intergenerational missional ecclesiology must be central to the blended ecology of Fresh Expressions, coupled with the established church, as evidenced and supported by, (a) 1 Timothy 4:11-16; (b) Susanna Wesley; (c) missional ecclesiology; and (d) the theory of intergenerational dynamics in the workplace through a sociological perspective.

Following is a description and analysis of the project “Launching Intentional Intergenerational Communities as a Pathway for Missional Vitality,” including a detailed review of the methodology, implementation, analysis of data, and a summary of learnings. Considerations for further research and suggested applications are also considered.

Methodology

Project Overview

This project was conducted over six weeks with participants from different generational cohorts engaged in active learning workshops centered on the FX Journey. They also shared their personal experiences and insights through pre- and post- workshop questionnaires, focused group discussions, focused journal prompts, and focused personal interviews following the workshops. Each of these elements were both enriching for participants and provided data collection points to analyze and test the hypothesis. They confirmed the need for more intentional intergenerational work in the Church and provided real time feedback during the project.

Foundational research connected with the feedback, observation, and experiences of participants, helped support and confirm the hypothesis. Older and younger adults who participated together in this intentional intergenerational learning community about the FX Journey formed more understanding relationships across generational cohorts and several of them were motivated to launch a Fresh Expression together in the future instead of being the culmination of the project as planned. Launching a Fresh Expression like “Messy Church” by the end of the project was not feasible. Instead, participants hosted an immersive “Dinner-Church”-like experience for the broader church community during a Palm Sunday potluck. This gave them a taste of what could be.

“Messy Church” is “a way of being church for all ages to join in experiencing fun and faith formative activities.”⁴ Messy Churches are “found throughout the globe” and “based on the values of all ages together, celebration, hospitality, and centering ourselves in Christ,”⁵ which would have been ideal for an intergenerational project. In more detail below, sessions included workshops on the FX Journey, “Messy Church,” and “Dinner Church,” as well as a Fresh Expressions dreaming and planning session. “Dinner Church” is like it sounds, an expression of church gathered around a dinner table or meal of some sort. Dinner Churches may include hearing and discussing a “Jesus Story” from Scripture and a time of prayer for those present, among other elements.

The data that follows highlights exciting hope for the present and future Church toward better understanding among generational cohorts through learning about and launching Fresh Expressions. Data was collected over eight weeks as allotted and

⁴ “Welcome to Messy Church, USA,” Messy Church, USA, accessed January 27, 2024, <https://messychurchusa.org/>.

⁵ Messy Church, USA, “Welcome to Messy Church, USA.”

required for project implementation. Research was qualitative to measure changes in participants thinking and attitudes about developing more understanding relationships among generational cohorts and their motivation to launch a Fresh Expression together. The goal of the project was to measure change in cognitive thinking about the problem of older and younger adults not knowing how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission. Collected data supported the proposed hypothesis as a solution to the problem statement.

Each question was carefully curated to collect specific data and included space for participants to expand their answers on pre- and post- project questionnaires. This allowed for before and after data to measure qualitative changes in participant thinking and attitudes. In retrospect, questions should have specified that responses should be about the broader Church while flavored by experiences with Mishawka First. There also should have been an option for “unsure” or “undecided.”

Focused group discussions for each workshop allowed participants to expand their thoughts and explain how they processed the workshop practices and material. They allowed participants to interact with one another based on their mutual learning. Focused group discussion questions were appropriately peppered throughout the workshops to invite shared insight, feedback, and processing among participants.

Focused journaling and interviews gave participants a way to share personal reflections, including those that they may not have wanted to share with the whole group. They also provided participants with a means to verbalize their take-aways. Focused individual interviews occurred towards the end of the allotted time for the project and

after all sessions were complete to allow participants to share specific learning from the workshop sessions that helped change their thinking and attitudes.

The varied data collection methods allowed for different personalities to process and interact as needed and allowed for triangulation of data if one of the four collection methods failed, which they did not. All data was gathered through standard academic research methods that were supported and approved by human research ethics. Questions were crafted to encourage consistency of participant responses.

Professional associates provided wisdom, insight, feedback, and resource suggestions during the overall process from research to project implementation, especially on foundational chapters. They helped to expand and refine arguments where they needed to be strengthened or clarified. Context associates provided help with project implementation, gathering participants, and collection of data in a confidential matter; many were also project participants. As a research project, “Launching Intentional Intergenerational Communities as a Pathway for Missional Vitality” allowed for data collection in real-time as they related to the hypothesis, fostering support for the future mission and ministry of the Church as a whole and Mishawaka First in particular.

Participants

This project was specifically designed to have participants representing different ages and/or generational cohorts. Registration was open to interested Mishawaka First members and constituents as well as parents/guardians of Mishawaka First preschool children. To ensure an appropriate sample of participants across generational cohorts,

targeted personal emails and phone calls were also made. Potential participants could sign up via link, in response to the email, or via phone call.

The project was designed to be implemented over eight weeks with six workshop sessions, which meant that several people were not able to commit to participating in all sessions. While workshops were open to all who were interested, only data collected from participants who were able to commit to all sessions was used. Many people expressed interest in participating in the workshops at a later date without the restraints and obligations of the research project and process, which is encouraging. In addition to the sessions themselves, those who were able to fully participate also agreed to complete pre- and post- project questionnaires as well as post-project focused individual interviews.

The workshops were attended by 24 participants, 15 of whom completed the entire project. All participants were members or constituents of Mishawaka First, and no parents or guardians of children from the preschool program were able to participate. Among the 15 full participants, two (13%) identified as Traditionalists (born before 1946), six (40%) identified as Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), four (27%) identified as Gen X (born 1965-1980), two (13%) identified as Millennials (born 1981-1998), and one (7%) identified as Gen Z (born 1999-2019). While participants came with a variety of backgrounds and life experiences, this was the only relevant demographic data. All participants seemed deeply invested in Mishawaka First's mission and ministry efforts and are eager for the church to become more intergenerational.

Implementation

This project centered on a six-week series of workshops with focused individual interviews in the following two weeks. Participants were provided with workbooks, including project expectations and an understanding that they were joining an official doctoral ministry research project. As such, all participants signed “informed consent” forms acknowledging their agreement to the terms of the project. Also included was information on the FX Journey created by Luke Edwards, and the workshops themselves, which I developed based on his work, *Becoming Church: A Trail Guide to Starting Fresh Expressions*. Since Fresh Expressions are meant to multiply into other missional communities, workshop facilitator guides were part of the workbook. Upon completion, participants who start a Fresh Expression can replicate the material and use it to train others in their community on the FX Journey. Sharing the workshop facilitator guides from the outset allowed them to immediately have tools towards this end.

Pre-workshop questionnaires were completed during the first session in addition to the informed consent agreements. Participants were assigned randomized identification numbers, so that data could be collected and managed accurately and confidentially. Participants are referred to here by their participation numbers only. Project sessions were held in Mishawaka First’s multi-purpose Fellowship Hall at round tables. Since many Fresh Expressions happen around a meal or snacks, context associates helped provide light refreshments. The pleasant space allowed participants to feel relaxed and to comfortably open up in honest discussion, feedback, and data collection. They built

stronger relationships during the project, which helped to confirm the hypothesis that this kind of learning environment helps build intergenerational relationships.

Each session was designed for participants to do most of the talking through guided learning, discussion, and practice. Each session included at least one activity to practice a principle of the FX Journey, “Messy Church,” or “Dinner Church.” It was a hands-on approach to learning and engaging different learning styles. The principle is that people do not long remember what we say, but they do long remember what they do. In other words, it was active learning. Each session was around 90 minutes and included time for focused group discussion and individual journaling.

Weeks one, three, four, and five included workshops focused on the six stages in the FX Journey: Listening, Forming Relationships, Building Community, and Exploring Discipleship. Then the Church Taking Shape and Do It Again stages were combined into one workshop. Week two was a workshop on the “Messy Church” and “Dinner Church” models. Week four included a Fresh Expressions dreaming and planning session. The outline for the project, reflecting midcourse modifications, is as follows.

Week 1: Workshop #1 (February 18)

- Module 1: Pre-Project Questionnaires (15 minutes)
- Introducing the Fresh Expressions Journey (40 minutes)
- Module 2: Fresh Expressions—Listening (35 minutes)

Week 2: Introduce Messy Church and Dinner Church Models (February 25)

- Introducing Messy Church and Dinner Church Models (90 minutes)

Week 3: Workshop #2 (March 3)

- Module 3: Fresh Expressions—Forming Relationships (75 minutes)

Week 4: Workshop #3 (March 10)

- Module 4: Fresh Expressions—Building Community (45 minutes)
- Dreaming and Planning Fresh Expressions (45 minutes)

Week 5: Dream and Plan Messy Church or Dinner Church Gathering (March 17)

Module 5: Fresh Expressions—Exploring Discipleship (45 minutes)

Module 6: Fresh Expressions—Church Taking Shape; Do It Again (45 minutes)

Week 6: Sample Messy Church or Dinner Church Gathering (March 24)

Dinner-Church-Like Gathering Post-Project Questionnaires; (90 minutes)

Data collection points, specifically focused group discussion and focused journal prompts, were built into the workshops, while pre- and post- project questionnaires and post-focused individual interviews came before and after the project respectively. This was where information and discussion shifted from the problem to the hypothesized solution, while also remaining in the context of each workshop. Both the group discussion and journaling required more time than allotted to allow for sufficient data collection. As a result, adjustments were made and workshops were often shortened on the fly. The group discussion questions in particular fit well within the workshops and would not have to be removed in other settings. However, more time would need to be allotted; it was too ambitious to try to accomplish two modules in one session.

Participants were provided with composition books to complete focused journal prompts. The pre- and post- projects questionnaires and composition books were labeled with randomized numbers instead of names to maintain participant confidentiality and to protect the data collected. Individual interviews occurred within two weeks of the last session, and questions focused primarily on participant learnings and take-aways from the workshops and experiences. Each participant was also invited to ask any follow-up questions and provide feedback. Questionnaires, discussion guides, journal prompts, interview questions, and all workshop facilitator guides can be found in the appendix. Following is a brief summary of each session.

During the first session, participants received their materials, were assigned seats to ensure that there were persons from different age groups represented at each table, and completed pre-project questionnaires. The overall project and expectations were introduced, and then the first modules were presented on Fresh Expressions, the FX Journey, and its first stage, Listening to Understand.

The FX Journey is often depicted as a circle instead of a linear process because it is meant to be cyclical and replicated. The stages of the Journey often overlap and even pile up on each other. For example, we never really stop listening to God, our church family, and our community. Listening in these three areas helps us to see where these areas may converge in ways to connect with people who are not already part of any church. It may take time to move from one stage to the next, and when movement happens, the principles of the previous stages remain. For example, when we explore discipleship with those who are ready, we continue to form relationships with new people and offer social gatherings to build community.

Week two was an immersive experience into abbreviated versions of “Messy Church” and “Dinner Church” as described above. Forming Relationships and Building Community were explored in week three and week four respectively because the Forming Relationships module took longer than anticipated. Participants learned principles for forming relationships with new people by seeking simple ways to connect with them, based on conversations and common interests. Then they learned principles the following week for moving from Forming Relationships with individuals to Building Community with a group of people.

In addition to the Building Community workshop, week four included a module on dreaming and planning Fresh Expressions. While initially intended to be a planning session towards launching a “Messy Church,” it was an energizing time of brainstorming that allowed participants to hear the thoughts and hearts of fellow participants as they began to develop an understanding and passion for Fresh Expressions.

In week five, participants learned that moving from Building Community to Exploring Discipleship is often the most challenging part of the Fresh Expressions Journey, but it is also easier than we make it out to be. This move is the key difference between being a fresh initiative, or way of relating missionally to the community, and becoming a true Fresh Expression of Church. Even if the new group does not go beyond the social gathering, it is still a good way to relate with people in the community. However, exploring discipleship does not need to be overcomplicated. It may be as simple as inviting those who are part of the group to stick around after the social gathering for a time of prayer or sharing a story about Jesus in Scripture and discussing it.

Participants learned some practical ideas and principles for helping the new Fresh Expression to move to a more mature expression of church in its own right. This often happens by adding other elements of Church like sharing in the sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) and serving others together as a group. This module also touched on the last stage in the FX Journey, Do It Again, by explaining that participants will be able to replicate this whole process themselves since they are now trained in the FX Journey.

Summary of Learnings

Again, the hypothesis of this project states that older and younger adults participating together in an intentional learning community about the Fresh Expressions Journey will help them form more understanding relationships and motivate them to launch a Fresh Expression like “Messy Church” together. The project was designed as a solution to the problem of older and younger adults not knowing how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission. In their pre-project questionnaire, Participant 22 directly confirmed the problem statement that the Church does not “know how to reach younger generations where they are.” The goal was to help Mishawaka First, and the broader Church, to intentionally become more intergenerational via Fresh Expressions as pathways towards missional vitality. A subsequent goal was to build relationships and trust across generational cohorts with Fresh Expressions as a means to reach people of all ages where they live, work, learn, play, and spend time.

As noted, the hypothesis was confirmed even though a new Fresh Expression was not launched by the end, but several participants were motivated to launch one in the future and launch a team of adventurers. This actually demonstrated that the participants were understanding the concepts well because they wanted to slow down enough to better understand the FX Journey and then work to implement it. This could have been two projects or two smaller units of a larger project: (1) learning about Fresh Expressions and the FX Journey and (2) seeking to implement learning via developing and launching a Fresh Expression. Therefore, the hypothesis proved to be an answer to the Church’s need

to develop better intergenerational relationships by learning together. Participants across the age spectrum felt closer to one another by the end of the project.

Pre- and Post- Project Questionnaires

The first question of the pre- and post- project questionnaire asked participants to identify the generations cohort they identify with: (a) Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964), (b) Gen X (born 1965-1980), (c) Millennial (born 1981-1998), (d) Gen Z (born 1999-2019), or (e) Traditionalists (born before 1946).⁶ As noted previously, the group included 13% Traditionalists, 40% Baby Boomers, 27% Gen X, 13% Millennials, and 7% Gen Z. Again, this was the only relevant demographic data for this study since the aim was to be sure to have people from different generational cohorts represented and interacting with one another while learning about Fresh Expressions. Obviously, no participants shifted from one generational cohort to another from the beginning to the end of the project.

The bulk of the questions were designed to gauge participant perceptions about the inherited or established Church, the degree to which the Church is intergenerational, and familiarity with Fresh Expressions. While all questions were qualitative, quantitative metrics were put in place via multiple choice responses to be able to measure changes in perceptions, thinking, and attitude by the end of the project. Participants were able to further clarify their responses with the open ended “Why?” question.

The second question asked participants to gauge their perception of how intergenerational they think the Church is currently. Prior to the project, none see the

⁶ This generation was embarrassingly left out of the research questions, and the group had fun giving me a hard time about it.

Church as (a) very intergenerational, 20% see it as (b) somewhat intergenerational, 20% were (c) neutral, 60% see the Church as (d) not very intergenerational, and none see the Church as (e) not intergenerational at all, which is hopeful. After the project none see the Church as (a) very intergenerational, 47% see it as (b) somewhat intergenerational, 13% were (c) neutral, 40% see the Church as (d) not very intergenerational, and none see the Church as (e) not intergenerational at all, which remains hopeful. It seems as though the intergenerational nature of this project caused a shift from not very intergenerational to somewhat intergenerational. Perhaps this is a shift from quantity—we do not have much generational diversity—to quality—at least we are being intergenerational where we can.

All participants were able to easily recognize the disproportionate amount of older to younger people and how the Church “is not bringing in new generations” according to Participant 29. This illustrated the common assumption that the goal is to bring people into the established church. Participant 15 correctly noted the “silo-ing” effect of generational differences “where people group with others with similar life experiences.” The Church has accentuated this issue with age-segregated ministries.

“Some Baby Boomer kids may be believers but don’t feel the need to attend church services,” Participant 20 said, which is to say that they “self-identify as ‘spiritual but not religious...’ and have less time with more activities on Sundays,” as Participant 22 correctly noted. “Younger generations often drift from organized religion.” There are an increasing number of people whose parents were not active, thus many people are one or two generations removed from any church connection. Participant 30 sees young people as “believing in God but not necessarily organized religion.” Adding more details post-project, “They are interested in the essence of church, but not the organization of

church. They want to do Jesus things and care for people and are interested in fairness and justice, but not in the way older generations may be accustomed to."

The third and fourth questions asked participants to gauge their perception of active participation levels in the life of the Church by older and younger generations respectively. 47% see older generations as (a) very interested, 33% as (b) somewhat interested, 13% were (c) neutral, 7% see older generations as (d) somewhat uninterested, and none as (e) very uninterested. Meanwhile, none see younger generations as (a) very interested, 7% as (b) somewhat interested, 33% were (c) neutral, 53% see younger generations as (d) somewhat uninterested, and 7% as (e) very uninterested. This illustrates an initial inverse relationship between the interest levels of older generations as compared to the interest level of younger generations in the life of the Church.

After the project 33% see older generations as (a) very interested, 54% as (b) somewhat interested, none were (c) neutral, 13% see older generations as (d) somewhat uninterested, and none as (e) very uninterested. Meanwhile, none see younger generations as (a) very interested, 27% as (b) somewhat interested, 33% were (c) neutral, 20% see younger generations as (d) somewhat uninterested, and 20% as (e) very uninterested. Again, since this project was intergenerational, the shift is likely due to seeing that young people are more interested than previously realized, just in different ways. Then, as people continue to age, they are still interested in participation in the life of the church but may become less able to do so; participation just may not be as active as it once was.

Participant 7 noted the phenomenon and common attitude that many older church members "seem to think they've done their part and now younger people can take care of things." This is certainly difficult when members continue to age and there are fewer

young people. While it is important to pass the faith and the church on to the next generation, thereby giving them more leadership responsibility in the church, this does not happen automatically or by members “retiring” from mission and ministry. It happens by older adults intentionally mentoring and actively passing the baton to young people.

Along with others, Participant 8 noted how older generations were “brought up in the church since childhood” and then “raised our children to attend and be active in the church.” There are generational differences in motivation for church involvement. Older generations are more often duty driven—go to church, pay your taxes, serve your country and community—because that is what good citizens do. Note the use of “expect(ation)”:

- “The expectation to serve was more part of the church experience,” Participant 15.
- “Children of church members were expected to attend; mine were,” Participant 20.

Meanwhile, younger generations are interested in groups whose vision or cause they believe in. Therefore, we cannot approach individuals in any generational cohort as having the same motivations or preferences as another. There was clear reluctance from some participants to see modes of church shift for new generations based on preference for more traditional modes. It is cliché but true, that the message never changes but the methods can and must change.

While Participant 10 noted the limited ability of some older members, including “health, transportation, and financial” limitations, Participant 17 noted how “older generations are more likely to participate” because they may have more time in retirement or as empty nesters. “As a rule, and there are exceptions,” Participant 20 said,

“the older you are, the less ‘active’ is your participation. Meanwhile, there is a lot more competition for the time of younger generations. Participant 17 added, “I don’t think younger generations are against participation, they are just interested in and busy with other things.” This made an interesting correlation that younger generations share with elderly church members with limitations: a lack of active church participation.

The fifth question asked participants to gauge their perception of how active the Church has been in reaching out, welcoming, and accommodating persons of all ages. 20% identify the Church as (a) very active, 46% as (b) somewhat active, 7% were (c) neutral, 20% identify the Church as (d) somewhat inactive, and 7% as (e) very inactive. After the project 26% identify the Church as (a) very active, 33% as (b) somewhat active, 7% were (c) neutral, 27% identify the Church as (d) somewhat inactive, and 7% as (e) very inactive. In retrospect, this could have been divided into a question about welcoming and accommodating and a question about reaching out. If this had been two different questions on reaching out and welcoming, most participants would score Mishawaka First as very welcoming but not as strong on reaching out to persons of all ages.

There is little doubt that Mishawaka First is a welcoming and friendly church. Participant 20 said, “We score higher in welcoming and accommodating, and not so much on the reaching out part. Welcoming is our strong suit.” We need improvement on reaching out missionally; however, even welcoming and inclusive churches like Mishawaka First can inadvertently be exclusive. While “there are numerous activities targeted at all generations,” Participant 17 said, many of these “activities are during the day of the work week,” as Participant 14 noted. This excludes younger people that are working during the day. For others, the broader Church is exclusive in a more harmful

way. Participant 21 said, “The Church has a well-earned reputation for being anti- rather than accepting and welcoming.” In other words, the Church has come to be known more for what it is against than what it is for, or, as Participant 21 said, church “has become synonymous with judgement and so many negative connotations.”

“It is always hard to attract younger generations because there are not a lot of other young adults and families in the church,” Participant 29 noted. Churches notoriously struggle with young adult ministry and attracting enough young people to have critical mass. Even if they have strong children and youth programs, like Mishawaka First once had, there is often still a gap in emerging adult ministry. Participant 14 hopefully notes, “There’s not a lot right now for young children, but I believe we will get there.” Participant 21 took another approach: there is “more emphasis on elders and kids,” while confirming that “young adults are often skipped over.”

The sixth and seventh questions asked participants to gauge their perception of Church engagement with various age group: with what age group the Church engages with most and with what age group the Church engages with least respectively. 7% perceive the Church as most engaged with (a) children and youth, 33% with (b) young adults, 60% with (c) middle-aged adults, and none perceive the Church as most engaged with (d) older adults. Meanwhile, 20% perceive the Church as least engaged with (a) children and youth, 46% with (b) young adults, 20% with (c) middle-aged adults, 7% with (d) older adults, and 7% did not answer this question.

After the project, 7% perceive the Church as most engaged with (a) children and youth, none with (b) young adults, 13% with (c) middle-aged adults, 67% with (d) older adults, and 13% did not answer. Meanwhile, 20% perceive the Church as least engaged

with (a) children and youth, 54% with (b) young adults, none with (c) middle-aged adults, 13% with (d) older adults, and 13% did not answer this question. Participants recognized that there is at least some engagement with children and youth, more engagement with middle-aged or older adults, and the least engagement with young adults.

“There aren’t many younger people in the congregation,” Participant 17 said, “but it feels as though things are more directed at people who are older and have experienced a lot of life but are not exactly elderly.” Since “older adults are participating anyway, there does not need to be as much outreach to get them to participate” as with younger groups. Confirming the project hypothesis and the need for different modes of church like Fresh Expressions, Participant 20 said, younger generations “are far less likely to participate in ‘traditional’ churches,” while Participant 21 noted the inverse that older adults “tend to be stuck in their ways or ‘traditions.’”

The last question asked participants to gauge their familiarity with Fresh Expressions of Church and Messy Church. 13% felt (a) very familiar, 7% (b) somewhat familiar, none were (c) neutral, 47% felt (d) somewhat unfamiliar, and 33% felt (e) very unfamiliar. After the project, there was an overwhelming shift in understanding from unfamiliarity to familiarity with Fresh Expressions. 27% felt (a) very familiar, 67% (b) somewhat familiar, and 6% were (c) neutral. None felt (d) somewhat unfamiliar or (e) very unfamiliar. Participant 29 captured a key take away from many, “I understand that we need to go outside the walls of the church to meet people where they are.”

Focused Group Discussions

The goal of focused group discussions was for participants to further engage with one another, to engage with the workshop material and practices, and to allow for other observations as they learned. Each question was designed for participants to consider their opinion of the material and practices as well as potential applications. Participant feedback to group discussion questions ultimately supported the hypothesis. As noted, instead of launching a “Messy Church,” the five sessions led up to the sixth, a Dinner-Church-like immersive experience for Mishawaka First.

The first session covered Fresh Expressions as a whole and the first stage in the FX Journey, Listening to Understand. The first question asked participants to discuss ways that Fresh Expressions can help the Church become more intergenerational. The second asked them to discuss how the Church can more intentionally listen to persons of all ages, and the third question asked them to discuss what challenges there are to becoming more intentionally intergenerational as a counterbalance to the second question.

Themes included finding common interests, identifying barriers to relationship, the lack of intergenerational interaction in society as a whole, and the related lack of mentoring between older and younger people. “If Fresh Expressions are meeting people where they are and listening to them,” Participant 22 said regarding barriers to relationship, “we can begin to understand barriers as to why people aren’t more intergenerational or why people might feel uncomfortable with certain generations.” Participant 25 correctly noted, “It’s not a matter of the church being relevant, but it’s a

matter of the church wanting to build relationships.” As for mentoring relationships, Participant 7 noted how learning goes both ways; young and old learn from each other.

While Participant 17 agreed that, “A lot of conversations are formed around the similarities that we have with each other,” they also noted, “It is equally important to find and appreciate differences too, which are often fascinating.” Participants shared several examples of groups coming together over similarities and differences, including an intergenerational group of women helping one another to know that they were not alone in challenges of parenting and spousal relationship. Participant 20 shared, “I was a part of a church that had a few LGBTQ people who started attending, and then decided to come around to Sunday school classes to share their stories and invite questions.”

One challenge, according to Participant 7, is that young voices are not often at the table to even talk about the future of the church and its mission and ministry. “That’s one of the areas where we really need to be listening to what they want and need,” but they are largely missing from the discussion. Another challenge is a cultural language barrier. “Generations often speak different languages,” Participant 23 said. “So, it’s easy for me to misunderstand.” To help with communication between older and younger people, “It’s important to create a safe space,” Participant 21 said. “For younger people, they often feel like they aren’t taken seriously by older people, and older people feel like they’re not being listened to by younger people. We need to maybe get past that and just talk to people like they’re people, instead of talking to people as if they’re a certain age.” Interestingly, to stop being as concerned with age may be better intergenerationally.

The second session was an introduction to the “Messy Church” and “Dinner Church” models by way of an abbreviated immersive experience of each. The first

question asked participants to discuss ways in which people of all ages are made to feel welcome in our current church or that they belong with us. The second question asked participants to discuss how Fresh Expressions like “Messy Church” can help us to make persons of all ages feel welcome or that they belong. The third question asked them to discuss how Fresh Expressions like “Messy Church” can present challenges to creating welcoming and belonging as a counterbalance to the second question.

Participants enjoyed the interactive nature of the activities used to illustrate the wisdom of building our spiritual houses on the rock of Christ as seen in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 7:24-27. Participant 23 immediately noted how the nature of play can bring all ages together while Participant 5 noticed how it can bring people together who do not know each other well and begin to establish relationships. Another advantage to “Messy Church” and other Fresh Expressions, Participant 22 noted, “There is no hierarchy. Maybe someone is doing a devotion from their phone, but there’s no one calling us to order, and we’re not all facing the front.” For our worship services, “Some of you are literally on the stage, and that’s not a bad thing, but with things like ‘Messy Church,’ there is no hierarchy, but spiritual hunger is being fed in different ways.”

Of course a challenge Participant 23 noted regards various personalities in the group dynamic. “If you get one person who wants to take charge, people may butt heads the whole time, and some may shut down.” There are always going to be challenges regarding group, leadership, and personality dynamics, which are arguably reasons to do activities like this and not avoid them. People always learn and grow in community, and it can be risky at the same time. Another challenge Participant 22 noticed is when “we’re trying to bring people to the table who don’t traditionally feel comfortable, the Jesus part

could be challenging in how that's presented." Those in the church are "in the club already, and if someone has felt victimized or excluded by the church, this could be a barrier." These are often Church barriers, not Jesus barriers, but the Church can and should help people heal from religious trauma and find reconciliation either way.

The third session on Forming Relationships went long, and Building Community was moved to the fourth session, along with dreaming and planning Fresh Expressions together. The first question asked participants to discuss the ways in which we are forming relationships and building community with persons of all ages in our church and community. The second question asked participants to discuss how we can better form relationships and build community with persons of all ages in our church or community, and the third question asked them how forming relationships and building community can be challenging as a counterbalance to the second question.

"Getting out and actually taking part in community events would be a good start," Participant 21 said. "I don't know anything about Mishawaka's resources, population, communities, or needs," Participant 22 said, "but I loved that one of the pastors from South Bend that works with the city on homelessness visited Mishawaka First. Are there other guests that could come and talk about what happens in Mishawaka?" Forming relationships with community and non-profit leaders can lead to partnerships and help to form relationships and build community with those in need. "Listening could be inviting community leaders to share where they see that relationship and community is needed." Intergenerationally, this also includes listening to teachers and school administrators.

Participant 30 talked about the Fig Leaf Boutique, a clothing ministry of Mishawka First that is off campus, with the potential for developing related Fresh

Expressions. “We are building relationships and community with the Fig Leaf, but I don’t know that the people think of it as church but as a place to come and get what they need.”

I talked with this Participant about perhaps hosting a cookout or projecting a family-friendly movie on the wall during the summer. “The Fig” has so much potential.

“Sometimes you just have to ask,” Participant 20 noted. While sign-ups do not always work, “My former church put out something to decide if we needed to have a women’s support group, and it was one of the most valuable groups that I was ever a part of. It was intergenerational, and we met together for years to support one another.

Sometimes you just need to start something with an open invitation.” Participant 21 shared the importance of just showing up. “Showing up at places like pride events where a lot of people may have been hurt by the church as a whole is a good first step in some healing that needs to be done.” They added, “That’s why we actively try to be people who aren’t against things. I think Christianity as a whole is starting to be known for what we’re against than what we’re for.”

“One of the challenges is, what if it doesn’t work?” Participant 5 asked. “Then you’re no worse off than you already are,” Participant 21 responded. “I think that’s my fear,” Participant 22 said, “being worse off. There’s an opportunity to misunderstand a cultural or generational experience and possibly be offensive. We don’t know what we don’t know, and there is an opportunity to do more harm than good by accident.” This interaction indicates the need to overcome a fear of failure, especially when taking risks. Sometimes we “jump to label something a failure too soon,” Participant 7 countered. “So, we try it, and maybe it’s not a raging success right away. However, we may have small

successes, and we should celebrate them.” They added that we really need to be celebrating more success about what we’re already doing and telling those stories.

Finally, Participant 21 assuaged the concern, “As long as we’re not out there actively doing harm, don’t consider it a failure, because as long as we’re trying, we’re not going to know what works in the community until we do.” It’s far easier to sit on our hands and say, “Well, that’s not going to work.” Participant 20 said the Greatest Gift Journey event during Advent is a good example. “Maybe it’s not got a thousand people coming through, but we are touching the lives of those who do. Many come back and say, ‘I come every year...’ or ‘I bring by grandchildren every year because...’ So, yes, celebrate. There’s somebody in this congregation who made that connection, and it’s a great way to amplify our vision statement. ‘Look at how I connected with this person, and it connected them with Jesus.’”

Discussion of the last sessions were combined. The fourth session included a dreaming and planning session on Fresh Expressions, since it was determined that we would not launch a “Messy Church” by the end of the project. The first question asked participants to discuss ways in which our community would benefit from Fresh Expressions like “Messy Church” or “Dinner Church.” The second question asked participants to discuss ways in which they can help us to be more intentionally intergenerational, and the last question asked participants to discuss concerns they had about Fresh Expression like “Messy Church,” “Dinner Church,” and others.

Then the fifth session of the project included workshops on the last half of the FX Journey: Exploring Discipleship and then combining Church Taking Shape with Do It Again. The first question asked participants to discuss ways in which we can come

alongside persons of all ages for intentional discipleship. The second question asked them to discuss how we can form Fresh Expressions or new Christian community with persons of all ages in mind, and the third question asked participants to discuss what is challenging about coming alongside persons of all ages for intentional discipleship to counterbalance to the second one.

While an argument can be made that everything is spiritual, not everything can necessarily be considered discipleship. Coming off of the excitement of a trivia night that the preschool hosted the night before this discussion, participants shared more about how this formed relationships and built community. While these are important elements of discipleship and illustrate how they were beginning to understand previous moves in the FX Journey, it also illustrates how discipleship—whether formal or informal—is often the most challenging shift in a Fresh Expression. Some elements of discipleship and new Christian community that came up included:

- “Elements of authenticity and vulnerability” and “anticipating barriers and being collaborative,” i.e. when a group meets; language, vocabulary, and literacy issues; transportation; etc., Participant 22.
- “You talked about the circular part of [the FX Journey]. Develop a small and vibrant group, and then move on to develop another one, and so on. Then have some unifying thing to pull these small groups together,” Participant 20, perhaps unknowingly describing a network of Fresh Expressions.
- Relatedly, “That’s how megachurches operate with small groups in connection with the bigger body,” Participant 7. They have to think smaller as they grow.

Several of the participants struggled with the essentials of church and worship as related to their preferences for each, while others argued that even some of the marks of the Church, or at least the ways they have been characterized or implemented, may be part of the problem. In other words, even some of the ways the “traditional” elements of worship and church were applied could be a source of past religious trauma for some. “So, it’s not just we get to know you,” Participant 7 said, “and then we adjust our worship so that you’ll feel comfortable coming,” or you adjust to our preferences. “It’s that we’re throwing out the template altogether and figuring this out together.”

Focused Journaling

Focused journaling prompts allowed participants to record thoughts in a more contemplative manner than group discussions and to share things that they may not have wished to share with the whole group. The first journaling prompt for the modules on Fresh Expressions and Listening to Understand asked participants to describe how they listen to understand people from different age groups and what it was like to learn about these principles with persons from different age groups than themselves.

“Listening to understand can and should be exciting, refreshing, and enlightening,” Participant 5 notes hopefully. This often starts, according to participant 7, by asking about or “sharing something personal to get the conversation started. In the end everyone wants to be understood and accepted. If you can create a safe environment to make that happen the results can be unexpected and wonderful.” Participant 10 added importance of “direct eye contact and asking good questions about their story.” Most

agreed that truly listening to others can often be a challenge and that sometimes age can be a factor.

“Comprehension benefits from context—being familiar with social norms that inform various generations,” Participant 15 noted. “Understanding social references and expectations helps to make connections and understand the ‘why’ as much as the ‘what.’” Participant 20 noted how intergenerational relationships take patience both ways, and they admit that they can often struggle with patience for both elders and those that are younger than themselves. “My kids and their peers are Millennials, and I listen to them far more carefully. I hunger for their thoughts and to learn their focus in life. They tend not to share as freely with folks ‘their parents’ ages. I love to build relationships as I am able with this age group.” While trying to be open-minded Participant 29 confessed, “I am certain there are biases about specific age groups” of which they may not be aware. “It takes more time and effort to ensure we are being intentional because we don’t know what we don’t know. Listening needs to happen in conjunction with learning, and this could be reading about other ages, or it could be talking and asking questions. I like to hear more from the younger generations, and I can empathize with them that it is not as comfortable to speak up. We need to prove to them that we are not here to judge and we like to hear from them.”

The second journaling prompt for session two on the “Messy Church” model asked participants to reflect on what it was like for them to learn about “Messy Church” and “Dinner Church” with persons from different age groups than themselves through an abbreviated immersive experience of both.

While “older groups seem more set in their ‘we’ve always done it that way’ kind of thinking,” Participant 5 said, “younger participants are often more open, curious, and willing to think outside the box and the church building. Today was fun and made us feel more cohesive and unified as a group. Another positive outcome was that we depended on one another to complete the task at hand.” Indeed, “activities are a great equalizer,” Participant 7 noted. “We were all willing to try and troubleshoot problems which led to laughter and discussion. Even when we failed at the objective we agreed that the process was a fun bonding experience.” Participant 15 observed how important play is as it opens us up, and how adults need to be able to play as well as children.

Participant 8 rightly blended “Messy Church” with the idea that Church can just be messy. “A Messy Church is one that allows change to happen and everybody to attend without question about who they are and what they believe. It is a church that is there to accept anyone” in the messiness of life. One of my concerns is that naming Fresh Expressions “Messy Church” or “Dinner Church” is the word “church” for those who have been hurt by previous church experiences. Another concern is for churched people who may struggle to see either as “real” church, even though including “church” in the name may help people see them as expressions of church in their own right.

“We still need quiet personal time for worship and not always fun and games,” Participant 10 said. This is also an example of immediate feedback that they may not be fully understanding Fresh Expressions and the blended ecology—that Fresh Expressions occur alongside the things the established church is already doing, not as replacements for more traditional modes of worship and discipleship. The Church Taking

Shape workshop helped with this understanding, but several struggled with the essentials of Church as compared to their preferences of church.

Participant 25 saw this less in terms of a learning activity as it is “an affirmation that we are willing to focus on seeing individuals as seekers, whether new to church or longtime participants. ‘Messy Church’ gives us permission to rethink our practices.” While the ‘seeker’ nomenclature is not used as often, Participant 25 indicated all are seekers after a fashion, which is an even-handed approach. Whether newcomers or lifelong church members, we are all seeking spiritual growth, community, etc.

The third journaling prompt for the modules on Forming Relationships and Building Community asked participants to describe how they form relationships and build community with persons from different age groups and to reflect on what it was like to learn about this with persons from different age groups than themselves.

Participant 5 hoped that this will “lead to increased social, emotional, and academic understanding and empathy.” At the same time this “could be a challenge.” Some things they say that help are (1) active listening and showing interest, (2) sharing what we have in common, and (3) doing so with respect. “Forming relationships and building community with groups of different age groups than my own is not a strong suit of mine,” Participant 14 admitted, “but I like to start with a smile. I hope to be welcoming with my demeanor, even if I am a shy person.”

On the other hand, Participant 15 participates in a choral group with multiple generations represented. “The differences in outlook and perspective can be challenging yet more often are a source of spiritual conversation and humor. Being in the ‘sandwich’ generation, I enjoy helping the younger members find their voice. It’s also very satisfying

to see a young person take the lead and be a part of mentoring that. Conversely, the best interactions with the older generations are when they share their wisdom but also let others lead.” This participant is describing a Fresh Expression already in the works. Participant 17 also forms “relationships and community with other age groups through music. Many people I play with or go see play are older than I am, but we find what our differences and commonalities are and learn from each other. I use the things I learn both musically and personally in my private life.”

“Christ teaches us to care for others. An attitude of love and care can surprise people, but it is welcomed,” Participant 20 said and then gives a practical example. “I like to write notes of encouragement when I can. These are unexpected by youth especially, who communicate primarily by phone, so they are actually treasured.” Participant 29 likes to “offer new acquaintances lots of space out of ‘fear’ that I might say something that brings up emotions or negative thoughts until I have a chance to get to know them.” This is a risk we all take in forming relationships, and it is not a reason not to do it. These things can actually deepen the relationships; for example recovery communities are built on sharing about life’s hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

“Finding commonality is helpful,” Participant 30 said. “That can springboard into building community with others who share that interest. This could be music, hobbies, reading preferences. None of these are necessarily limited to any particular age group. Asking someone to help you with a simple task can be a win-win for both.” This participant illustrates an understanding of several Fresh Expressions principles, i.e. forming relationships with individuals and then building community by bringing those individuals together, often over common interests. They also illustrate the principles of

not only serving others but asking them for help too. We all bring gifts and concerns to the table.

The fourth journaling prompt asked participants to reflect on what it was like for them to dream and plan possible Fresh Expressions with persons from different age groups than themselves. This was energizing, and a lot of great ideas came up like partnerships with the schools, a group for young moms and their children, and then a spin off idea from this for dads and husbands. Participant 15 noted the excitement of “seeing a young person with a vision [that] brings out a desire to be as supportive as possible.”

“One of the most beneficial outcomes of brainstorming is generating a variety of possibilities in a short period of time, Participant 5 said. “Brainstorming opens up additional ‘solutions’ than just our own ideas. It encourages ‘out of the box’ thinking and creativity.” When there are no wrong answers, it creates “an environment where all ideas are accepted and ideally no one is afraid to speak up. Participants feel they have ownership in the process.” Participant 14 agreed, “It’s nice to throw an idea out there with some uncertainty, but then hear others confirm it and contribute more to the idea.”

“This was the part of the experience that I was kind of dreading,” Participant 20 confessed. “I am not an idea person. I am more ‘boots on the ground’ implementation. Give me a task, and I will give it my all.” They also realized that this is where team work comes into play. Ideas people need “boots on the ground” implementation people; this was an important realization for Participant 20 who ended up thoroughly enjoying this session. On the other hand, “It can be a little challenging” not to immediately shut down ideas Participant 21 said. “When I presented the idea of ‘drag church,’ I laughed when I received the exact reaction that I was expecting. The older people in my group told me to

‘Pick something less outrageous.’ I think it is important that I laughed it off, didn’t get defensive, but suggested something a bit milder in the same vein—showing up at pride events. It’s important to show up with an open mind and be prepared for opposing opinions and to work toward a more neutral idea that may appeal to more people.”

Participant 29 made a discovery about Fresh Expressions: “We don’t have the volunteer capacity to run “Tower Café” anymore where we served omelets and lattes on Sunday morning. While this was a way to invite people into our church, we are now finding ways to invite people ‘at arm’s length’ to a restaurant, tavern, coffee shop, etc. It is a similar concept but eliminates concerns about volunteer staff and addresses the change in our world for people who may be turned off by walking into a church.”

The final journaling prompt on Exploring Discipleship, Church Taking Shape, and Do It Again, asked participants to describe how they explore discipleship and being the Church with persons from different age groups and reflect on what it was like to learn about these principles with persons from different age groups than themselves.

Participant 5 noted how it starts with our own discipleship. “We tend to concentrate on our target audience, which we certainly should, but we also need to be introspective. Applying the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ to discipleship instead of judgement will lead to a more positive outcome. We need to be patient and kind with others. This adventure is different than what many of us are used to, so we need to think beyond our traditions. These fundamentals already address important ingredients for discipleship like listening, open communication, and showing compassion.”

As if to illustrate how it starts with our own discipleship, Participant 14 shared about what happened that morning in worship. “I challenged myself to explore

discipleship with persons from different age groups by inviting the three children that attended church today to partake in a Bible lesson with me, and then by introducing myself to their family members. It felt good to put myself out there and open up to others. We learned about how God gave us the Bible, and one girl loved it so much she didn't want to leave, and her grandma opened up to me too."

Participant 8 mentions going to lunch together and then finding new ways to invite new friends to serve with us, like "assisting with the Greatest Gift Journey" during early December. This illustrates a shift in discipleship from starting with a worship service, then maybe joining a small group, and if you have time left, serving others. Now newcomers can jump in at any point. For example, several people who are not active church participants are active in the Fig Leaf Boutique clothing ministry. Something happens when people are invited to serve regardless of what their faith looks like.

"We discussed what a church meant to us and how it might mean different things for others." Participant 19 "found it very interesting how some felt some of the 'nonessentials' were very essential to a church. While trying to help others become more interested in God and worship, we must understand that many may not feel comfortable with anything we currently offer and be willing to start new communities."

"Discipleship is both rewarding and challenging," Participant 30 said. "Everyone is different, and what works for one may not work for another, which is where the exploring comes in. Being warm and friendly is a good start to forming relationships and trust with a person." It's in forming relationships with others that we can help them form a relationship with the Christ who is already present with them.

Focused Individual Interviews

Focused individual interviews were conducted in the days after the project. Initial questions asked them to reflect on their overall learning, on particular sessions or topics, and to share anything that they did not feel comfortable sharing with the larger group. More focused questions asked them to describe their thoughts, attitudes, and willingness to engage in mission and ministry with persons of all ages prior to this experience and then how this changed as a result of it. Participants were also asked to share what excites and concerns them about the future of the Church. The final question asked them to share any other insights, questions, or concerns they still will had.

“I think there are ways to engage new people and that will likely help our reputation in the community as a friendly congregation that meets people where they are,” Participant 7 said. “My biggest concern is that the older demographic in the congregation will not come onboard to engage in these programs. I think there are many people who are willing to give this a try, but I think we need to manage expectations. I think they like to say we need to do something, but they don’t necessarily want to take part.” Even among participants, several are interested in either launching a new Fresh Expression or being part of a team of adventures, others are not. Many openly admit to struggling to see past traditional modes of church.

Participant 21 was even more pointed. “I’m more concerned with the Church’s unwillingness to evolve in even the simplest ways. If the Church can’t, or won’t, change with the times, then the death of the Church, as a whole, is inevitable. How do we change and grow a church that holds tight to the past when you can’t force change?” One

outreach from the past holds merit as a reboot. “Manna Fest was a great outreach and needs to resume,” Participant 10 said. Manna Fest is an example of Mishawaka First doing a Fresh Expression like “Dinner Church” without realizing it, often drawing various people with struggles from the community. To their credit, they also say a new name would be helpful to differentiate it from the past. It is often more difficult to bring something back than it is to launch something new with similarities.

Open about their shyness but obviously passionate, Participant 14 said, “I wanted to engage in mission and ministry with persons of all ages, but I had no idea what that looked like or where to start. This experience has made me realize I can relate to persons of all ages and showed me how to get started. It excites me that we may really be able to get out there and help others, but it concerns me that we could just fall back into what’s comfortable and forget what we’ve learned.” Relatedly, Participant 20 said they are always open to engagement even though “these are possibilities that I have not really explored. Together there is excitement in the prospect, but alone is terrifying.” This is why we never go alone, and it takes at least two people to launch a Fresh Expression.

Participant 25 was perhaps the most optimistic. “I like how the people of Mishawaka First tend to be open and engaging. I see a significant number of people inviting and having conversation with newcomers. This project affirmed by belief that we are on the right track.”

Conclusion

While the previous chapters provided biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundational support to the problem of this project that many older and

younger adults do not know how to intentionally and effectively work together to create and implement mission, this chapter provided an analysis after testing the hypothesis. The hypothesis was that if older adults and younger adults were to participate together in an intentional learning community about the Fresh Expressions Journey, then they would form more understanding relationships across generational cohorts and be motivated to launch a Fresh Expression together.

This intentional intergenerational engagement will help address the state of decline and aging of the Church in a direct and proactive manner. The project ultimately confirmed the hypothesis as a solution to the problem. The participants are forming more understanding intergenerational relationships and are better equipped to intentionally seek out such relationships. All of this is beginning to result in better understanding and more cohesive mission and ministry among participants and to overflow to Mishawaka First as a whole as well as far reaching implications for the broader Church.

Overall, I was pleased with the outcome and how the project went. The hypothesis was confirmed and the participants and I learned together. Beyond learning the material itself, there was the benefit of relationships being built across generations, worship services, and various other differences beyond generational ones. This occurred through the learning, practices, working together towards common goals, discussions, and general fellowship in shared experiences. This workshop could have easily been a six weeks series on the FX Journey alone. Part two of the project, or a second project, could have developed this learning with implementation towards launching a Fresh Expression. I do not take issue with not having launched a Fresh Expression by the end as intended because it demonstrated that the participants understood the FX Journey well enough to

see that it often takes more time and patience than was allotted for this project. Several participants are motivated to start a Fresh Expression and some are willing to serve on a team of adventurers to help guide the Church towards developing others. Most participants grew in their missional understanding and appreciated the experience.

While Mishawaka First is not unlike many UMCs regarding the aging and decline of the Church in the U.S., my dream for this ministry is to “double and disciple” in the next several years. This may not look at all like going from an average of 150 in worship to 300 because worship attendance does not necessarily equal discipleship. There are really far better rubrics, such as 150 regular worship attenders becoming active members, if they are not already, that are equipped to impact 300 people in their daily lives throughout the week. This may look like just two new disciples per person, or 15-20 Fresh Expressions with 15-20 people each.

I certainly plan to use the workshop material again with others at Mishawaka First; as mentioned others indicated they would be interested at another time without the constraints of a project. I am pleased and humbled to already be asked to facilitate FX Journey workshops in the Indiana Conference of the UMC (INUMC) as an active member of the Fresh Expressions Steering Team and a Growing Young consultant. I have aspirations to grow as a Fresh Expressions adventurer myself and to perhaps lead the efforts in the INUMC one day if called upon like some of my mentors and peers. I could also see myself mentoring a doctoral cohort focused on intergenerational mission and ministry. On these related notes, I intend to publish this dissertation in a more formal manner but also to adapt some of the principles I have learned and am learning to

coauthor something like *Becoming Younger: A Trail Guide for Intergenerational Fresh Expressions* with my peer associate Luke Edwards.

If I were to do this project again, I could go a different direction with multiethnic learning communities and Fresh Expressions. Some have noted that Fresh Expressions seems to be a largely Caucasian movement, although this seems to be shifting. This is certainly true at United with a predominantly white cohort with more diversity beginning to happen. I wonder if this is because African-American and multiethnic churches are already doing Fresh Expressions and living into the blended ecology without necessarily using the same terminology. This could be another project as could considerations for the combination of multiethnic and intergenerational research, mission, and ministry.

APPENDIX A
PRE- AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre- and Post-Project Questionnaire

Participant Identification Number: _____ Years Active in Your Church: _____

1. Of which generational cohort are you a part? (a) Baby Boomer (born 1946-1964), (b) Gen X (born 1965-1980), (c) Millennial (born 1981-1998), (d) Gen Z (born 1999-2019).
2. How intergenerational is the Church—how active are persons of all ages in the life of the Church? (a) Very intergenerational, (b) somewhat intergenerational, (c) neutral, (d) not very intergenerational, (e) not intergenerational at all. Why?
3. How interested are older generations in active participation in the life of the Church? (a) Very interested, (b) somewhat interested, (c) neutral, (d) somewhat uninterested, (e) very uninterested. Why?
4. How interested are younger generations in active participation in the life of the Church? (a) Very interested, (b) somewhat interested, (c) neutral, (d) somewhat uninterested, (e) very uninterested. Why?
5. How active has the Church been in reaching out to, welcoming, and accommodating persons of all ages? (a) Very active, (b) somewhat active, (c) neutral, (d) somewhat inactive, (e) very inactive. Why?
6. With what age group is the Church most engaged? (a) Children and youth, (b) young adults, (c) middle-aged adults, (d) older adults? Why?
7. With what age group is the Church least engaged? (a) Children and youth, (b) young adults, (c) middle-aged adults, (d) older adults. Why?
8. How familiar are you with Fresh Expressions of Church and Messy Church? (a) Very familiar, (b) somewhat familiar, (c) neutral, (d) somewhat unfamiliar, (e) very unfamiliar. Why?

APPENDIX B
FOCUSED JOURNALING PROMPTS

Focused Journaling Prompts

1. Fresh Expressions and Listening to Understand – Describe how you listen to understand persons from different age groups than yourself. What was it like for you to learn about Fresh Expressions and Listening to Understand with persons from different age groups than yourself?
2. Messy Church – What was it like for you to learn about Messy Church with persons from different age groups than yourself?
3. Forming Relationships and Building Community – Describe how you form relationships and build community with persons from different age groups than yourself. What was it like for you to learn about Forming Relationships and Building Community with persons from different age groups than yourself?
4. Planning Messy Church – What was it like for you to plan a Messy Church gathering with persons from different age groups than yourself?
5. Exploring Discipleship, Church Taking Shape, and Do It Again – Describe how you explore discipleship and being the Church with persons from different age groups than yourself. What was it like for you to learn about Exploring Discipleship and Church Taking Shape with persons from different age groups than yourself?

APPENDIX C
FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Focused Group Discussion Questions

Fresh Expressions and Listening to Understand

1. In what ways can Fresh Expressions help the Church become more intergenerational?
2. In what ways can we more intentionally listen to understand persons of all ages?
3. What are the challenges of working to be more intentionally intergenerational?

Messy Church

1. In what ways are people of all ages made to feel welcome in our current church or that they belong with us?
2. In what ways can Fresh Expressions like Messy Church help us to make persons of all ages feel welcome or that they belong?
3. In what ways might Fresh Expressions like Messy Church present a challenge to creating welcoming and belonging?

Forming Relationships and Building Community

1. In what ways are we forming relationships and building community with persons of all ages in our church and community?
2. In what ways can we better form relationships and build community with persons of all ages in our church or community?
3. In what ways are forming relationships and building community with persons of all ages challenging?

Planning Messy Church

1. In what ways would our community benefit from Fresh Expressions like Messy Church?
2. In what ways can Fresh Expressions like Messy Church help us to be more intentionally intergenerational?
3. What are some of your concerns with launching a Fresh Expression like Messy Church?

Exploring Discipleship, Church Taking Shape, and Do It Again

1. In what ways can we come alongside persons of all ages for intentional discipleship?
2. In what ways can we form a Fresh Expression of church, or a new Christian community, with persons of all ages in mind?
3. In what ways is coming alongside persons of all ages for intentional discipleship challenging?

APPENDIX D
FOCUSED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focused Individual Interview Questions

Participant Identification Number: _____ Years Active in Your Church: _____

Basic questions may include:

- What do you think about our learning and topic in that session?
- Is there anything that you want to share with me that you did not feel comfortable sharing with the larger group?

More focused question may include:

1. Prior to this experience, what were your thoughts, attitudes, and willingness to engage in mission and ministry with persons of all ages?
2. In what ways did this experience change your thoughts, attitudes, and willingness to engage in mission and ministry with persons of all ages?
3. Since participating in the workshops and launching Messy Church, what excites you about the future of the Church? What concerns you?

What other insights, questions, or concerns do you still have?

APPENDIX E
FRESH EXPRESSIONS WORKSHOP

Fresh Expressions Workshop¹

Why Are Fresh Expressions Needed?

Hundreds of thousands of Americans leave formal religion every year. Interestingly, while the Church in the United States is declining and aging rapidly, people are actually increasingly spiritual. People are more interested in spirituality and less interested in the Church.

About 60% of the U.S. population are no longer interested in predominant forms of Church.² This means that a full 60% of the population will *never* be reached by traditional or established models of church. What would happen if we started different “Fresh Expressions” of Church that connected with this growing number of spiritual but not religious people?

This is the question the Church of England was asking almost twenty years ago, and the Fresh Expressions movement was the result. Fresh Expressions started in the Church of England in 2004 with another simple question: What do we need, or what is essential, to have church?

Under the leadership of Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury at the time, the Church of England studied innovative churches that were forming in response to increasing secularization. Churches were forming in pubs, parks, and other community spaces with people who had never been to church before. As more information about these new forms of Church emerged, they realized they were witnessing a movement of the Holy Spirit.

What is a Fresh Expression?

Fresh Expressions are defined as forms of Church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. They come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission, and making disciples.

They have the potential to become mature expressions of church shaped by the Gospel and the enduring marks of the Church within its cultural context.³ As the movement developed, five distinctive features emerged to differentiate Fresh Expressions from other innovative ministries.

¹ Adapted with permission from Edwards, *Becoming Church*.

² Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 29.

³ “Why Fresh Expressions,” Fresh Expressions, accessed January 27, 2024, <https://freshexpressions.com/about>.

- **Missional:** A Fresh Expression exists primarily for people who do not attend church.
- **Contextual:** A Fresh Expression finds culturally suitable ways to connect with people.
- **Incarnational:** A Fresh Expression goes to where people are in the community.
- **Formation:** A Fresh Expression aims to make disciples.
- **Ecclesial:** A Fresh Expression intends to become church with the people it connects with.

In the United States, most Fresh Expressions are connected to an anchor church, which provides leadership, support, and accountability. In turn, the anchor church receives the gift of connecting with people that would never come on Sunday morning. This mutually beneficial relationship is called the mixed ecology of Church—the established Church + Fresh Expressions.

The FX Journey

As Fresh Expressions sprang up in the U.K., leaders of the movement identified a path that most Fresh Expressions had travelled as they formed, which became the following six steps of the Fresh Expressions Journey that we'll explore in these workshops.

Listening: The Fresh Expressions journey begins with attentive listening to God and a specific community. By listening to God and our community first, we discover the path to starting a contextual expression of church that our neighbors will resonate with.

Forming Relationships: As prayer and listening continues, we form meaningful and lasting relationships with people outside the church that we invite into our newly forming community as we discover simple ways to love and serve one another.

Building Community: As relationships form between leaders of Fresh Expressions and their neighbors, a social gathering begins to take shape. Gatherings often begin around shared interests and meet in homes or community spaces.

Exploring Discipleship: This is the most challenging transition to make as leaders patiently look for opportunities to introduce discipleship to the group. Often, the best way for this to happen is to continue the social gathering as is and invite those who are interested to come to an additional gathering with a simple element of discipleship.

Allowing people to opt-in (or opt-out) keeps the social gatherings from being manipulative. It's worth noting that, while not technically a Fresh Expression if so, it's okay not to get to this step with people. You're still forming relationships, loving and serving, and building community with them as you trust the Holy Spirit to work in and through you.

Church Taking Shape: As disciples are formed, elements of Church like the sacraments, study of Scripture, and worship, are slowly added to the Fresh Expression. As more marks of the Church are incorporated, the Fresh Expression of church moves closer to becoming a mature expression of church in its own right.

Do It Again: After experiencing the process, every member of the Fresh Expression now has the ability to start one on their own. Individual Fresh Expressions become networks of Fresh Expressions and a movement is born—a mission and ministry of multiplication.

Conclusion

By the end of this project, we will have launched a Fresh Expression, and you will be ready to start your own. This journey will be challenging, but you go with Christ and thousands of others who have learned the Fresh Expression journey. Since every context is different, and there is no GPS for this journey, there are trail markers and guideposts along the way if you know where to look. It's an exciting and challenging journey, but you don't have to make it alone

APPENDIX F
LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND WORKSHOP

Listening to Understand Workshop¹

Subject: Many of us have had “Hi, how are you?” “I’m fine. How are you?” conversations with strangers or acquaintances where we’re not really all that interested in actually listening to them. Heaven forbid they say anything other than, “Fine,” preventing us from simply moving on with our day. Guilty! How about you? The Fresh Expressions journey invites us deeper.

The first stage in the FX Journey, and the title of this workshop, is “Listening to Understand”

Desired Result: To develop intentional listening skills to better understand our community and God as we form ideas for a Fresh Expression to form relationships with community members.

Definition: Fresh Expressions begin with deep listening to both God and our community.

- How do you define listening? What is the difference between hearing and listening?
- What does it mean to listen to understand?

Let’s agree that listening is moving from simply hearing sounds to understanding and responding to what we’ve heard. Listening leads, not only to understanding, but to actively responding.

Felt Need: It’s said that love is really spelled T-I-M-E—that is, loving is taking the time to be with and truly listen to someone. To have someone listen, is something we all long for.

- Why is listening important? Why is developing better listening skills important?
- Describe a time when you felt like you were not listened to. How did this make you feel?
- Describe a time when you felt deeply listened to. How did this make you feel?

Simone Weil says that true attention is “the rarest and purest form of generosity.”² This is the opposite of “Hi, how are you?” “I’m fine. How are you?” conversations. People want to know they are loveable and valuable, and this often begins with listening to them.

While almost cliché now, it’s true that “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Current Situation: All too often, we struggle to truly listen because, if we’re honest, we are often too busy thinking about ourselves and what we want to say next.

- What is the situation now regarding your listening skills and attitude? What has been your experience?

¹ Adapted with permission from Edwards, *Becoming Church*.

² Letter to Joe Bousquet, 13 April 1942: Simon Petrement Simone Weil: A Life (1976) tr. Raymond Rosenthal.

- Are you a good listener? Or is listening difficult for you? Why or why not? On one hand, our community is filled with local guides and helpful information if we just look and listen. On the other hand, churches are notorious for starting ministries without really listening to their community.

How It Could Be: As Christ-followers seek to listen to God and others, we will see where God is already moving in the community. To serve our community is to attentively listen with care.

- What should listening to God and others be like? What would be ideal? How would you like to be?
- In what ways can you become a better listener?

Sometimes people are listening and doing Fresh Expressions without even realizing it. For example, Tina offers floor and chair yoga most Friday mornings for seniors, helping participants to listen to their bodies, spirits, each other, and God through exercise and sharing a devotion.

Solutions: We can shift our attitudes and develop better listening skills.

- In what ways can we better listen to God and others?
- How can we develop listening skills? How can we learn to listen to understand?

Tomas Halik suggests a process of seeking *the hidden God*—“the God whom we seek and find in the lives of people beyond the visible boundaries of the Church.”³ Many Fresh Expressions start with a “listening project” to intentionally listen to God and their community.

- What are your reactions to Tomas Halik? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
- In what ways can we work a process of intentionally listening to God and others?

For example, First Canon UMC, a church of just 35 in the hills of Western North Carolina, asked 1,500 neighbors how they could pray for them. They wrote down their prayer requests, compiled the data, and were amazed at what they found out. Church members who had lived in the area their whole lives thought they knew all there was to know about their town.

They didn’t realize how many of their neighbors were mourning the loss of a loved one. The church started a grief group for those neighbors. Notice how this project involved listening to both God and their neighbors. Today, we’ll try an abbreviated version of a spiritual listening process called that Luke Edwards calls “*Lectio Vicinitas*,” Latin for “Neighborhood Reading.” It’s essentially a guided prayer walk.

Practice: *Lectio Vicinitas* – Neighborhood Reading

1. Prepare (*Silencio*) – As we prepare to depart, quiet your inner voice. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your steps and your observations. Seek a mindset of openness, leaving preconceived assumptions behind.

³ Tomas Halik, *Night of the Confessor: Christian Faith in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Image Books, 2012), 46.

2. Read (*Lectio*) – As you begin walking, take special notice of whatever and whomever you see. Try to minimize interpreting what you see and to maximize observation. Take note of where people are gathering. Look for words on signs, posters, or magazines. Observe the housing in the community. What stands out to you right away?
3. Meditate (*Meditatio*) – Find a quiet place to sit and reflect on what you saw. Replay the walk in your mind, stopping for moments that stood out. Rumble on these moments. What stood out to you about them? Slowly shift your focus from the mind to the heart. What feelings are stirred in you? What was happening under the surface? Where did you feel God's presence on your walk? Where could you see God already working?
4. Pray (*Oratio*) - Shift into a conversation with God about what you saw. Use a journal if it helps. Ask God some questions. Ask God for clarity in areas that are unclear. Ask where you might partner with God's redemptive work already happening in the community.
5. Contemplate (*Contemplatio*) – As you begin to close, jot down newly discovered insights about your neighborhood. Write down anything you feel God was saying to you in this time. Rest in God's presence for a few moments before returning to your daily tasks.

We turn now from listening to the God of our community to principles for listening to our community. Listening to our community centers on asking questions to understand it more deeply and to respond by forming a Fresh Expression that is valuable and fits well within the community. Not only is it important to ask a lot of questions, but it is also important to ask the *right* questions. Fresh Expressions begin by asking three main questions:

1. Who are our neighbors?
2. Who in our community is not connected to the Church? How are they already gathering?
3. To which group of people do we feel most called?

Related questions include: *What do our neighbors care about? What do our neighbors think about faith/spirituality? What gifts do our neighbors possess? Who is isolated? What burdens do neighbors carry? Where is Christ ahead of us, planting seeds of Christian community?*

Asking thoughtful questions that build on community strengths will help us understand where people are coming from as we start a Fresh Expression among them. We are not really bringing Christ into these spaces but pointing out the Christ that is already present with them.

Regarding affinity group Fresh Expressions, we more often relate to those we share interests with than just those we live closest to. We are more connected by networks than neighborhoods. Networks are formed where people live, work, learn, play, and spend time. Our community has hundreds of networks like runners, gamers, retirees, and gym members.

- What networks are you aware of already in our community?

- Is there a particular network God may be calling us to connect with?

A related sociological dimension is the shared community spaces, also known as “third places” where people meet. In a time where we are more connected digitally while more socially isolated than ever, these spaces are so important. Third places like parks, playgrounds, restaurants, gyms, coffee shops, and movie theaters are the places “where everybody knows your name.”

- What are shared community spaces that you frequent or hope to encounter as you listen?
- Which ones stand out to you as potential places to start a Fresh Expression?

Report: What were these learning experiences like for you?

- How was the Lectio Vicinitas prayer walk meaningful or helpful to you?
- How are the suggested questions for community listening helpful? What would you add?
- Based on what you experienced, what will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently?

Summarize: Our desired result is to develop intentional listening skills in order to better understand God and our community as we formulate ideas for a Fresh Expressions to love and serve community members.

We agreed that listening is moving from simply hearing sounds to understanding and responding to what we’ve heard. Listening leads, not only to understanding, but to actively responding.

Reflect: What was the most important idea or concept for you? What will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently based on our learning?

Focused Journaling Prompt: In your journal, describe how you listen to understand persons from different age groups than yourself. What was it like for you to learn about “Fresh Expressions” and “Listening to Understand” with persons from different age groups than yourself?

Application: Listening leads to action. We listen so that we might discern and follow the will of God. We take our time to listen, but eventually listening leads us to respond with action. We are listening to identify who our Fresh Expression will be for. It can’t be for everyone. We have to identify who we will connect with first. This is called “defining your who.”

- What group of people stirs your emotions or concerns you? Who do you care about?
- What “third places” do you feel at home in?

This may be the nudge of the Holy Spirit, calling you to a particular people or place. The Fresh Expressions Journey begins with listening, and listening to God and our community never ends.

Focused Group Discussion: In what ways can Fresh Expressions help the Church become more intergenerational?

In what ways can we more intentionally listen to understand persons of all ages?

What are the challenges of working to become more intentionally intergenerational?

APPENDIX G
MESSY CHURCH WORKSHOP

Messy Church Workshop¹ – “Church, but not as you know it.”

Why “Messy” Church?

The word “messy” is used to indicate that God is interested in people who are “messy” rather than perfect. God is often found in the mess of our lives. Therefore, Messy Church is not so much concerned with being a neat and orderly church service as it is being a fun event for people of all ages to learn about Christ. The Messy Church tagline is, “Church, but not as you know it.”

Messy Church...

- Is a way of being church for people of all ages involving fun.
- Is a church, not a craft club, that helps people encounter Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- Is found across the world.
- Values being Christ-centered, for all ages, based on creativity, hospitality, and celebration.
- Is part of BRF (Bible Reading Fellowship) which believe, with the historic Church, in one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Messy Church Values

Christ-Centered. Messy Church helps people to encounter and enter into a transforming relationships with Jesus Christ. Along with the historic Church, Messy Church believes in one God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer (or in traditional language, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

All Ages. Messy Church is for adults and children to enjoy together. Every element should be relevant and accessible to all ages.

Creativity. Messy Church is unique in that it uses hands-on activities to explore Bible stories, to reflect a God of creativity, and to give people a chance to play together.

Celebration. Messy Church reflects a God of joy who wants all of God’s people to have life in all its fullness.

Hospitality. Messy Church reflects a God of unconditional love and is a church for people outside the traditional church, providing an oasis of welcome and a safe place to thrive. Messy Church hospitality is expressed most evidently by eating a simple meal together.

Messy Church Components

Welcome.

¹ Based on material from “Welcome to Messy Church, USA,” Messy Church, USA, accessed January 27, 2024, <https://messychurchusa.org/>.

Activities. A creative time to explore a biblical theme through activities for all ages.

Celebration. A time with stories, prayer, song, and games for all ages.

Food. A sit-down meal together.

Focused Group Discussion: In what ways are people of all ages made to feel welcome in our church or that they belong with us?

In what ways can Fresh Expressions like Messy Church help us to make persons of all ages feel welcome or that they belong?

In what ways to Fresh Expressions like Messy Church present a challenge to creating welcoming and belonging?

Focused Journaling Prompt: In your journal, answer the following question. What was it like for you to learn about Messy Church with persons from different age groups than yourself?

APPENDIX H
FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WORKSHOP

Forming Relationships Workshop¹

Subject: The Fresh Expressions Journey is actually circular, where each stage continues into the next, and they even pile up on one another. In other words, we continue to listen to God and others. That never stops. Let's test your listening and awareness skills with two questions:

1. Can you hear the sound of my voice?
2. What was the first question I asked?

How did you do? Notice what you had to do. You had to answer my first question—hopefully your answer was yes—and then, you had to think back to what my first question was. This is intentional awareness and listening as we move into intentionally forming relationships.

The second stage in the FX Journey, and the title of this workshop, is “Forming Relationships.”

Desired Result: To form relationships by launching a Fresh Expression as a simple way to love and serve the people we are listening to and God is calling us to be with.

Definition: Fresh Expressions continue by forming meaningful and lasting relationships.

- How would you explain what it means to form meaningful and lasting relationships?
- What do meaningful and lasting relationships look like?

Let's agree that meaningful and lasting relationships begin to form when we reveal ourselves to others and they reveal themselves to us.

Felt Need: Friendships are foundational to meaningful and lasting relationships.

- Why are relationships so important? Why is it important to form new relationships?
- How do relationships help us to better love and serve those we have been listening to?
- Describe a meaningful relationship you've built in the last few years. In what ways was it meaningful to you?

Jesuit spiritual director William Barry asks what God wanted in creating us. “God—out of an abundance of divine relational life, not any need for us—desires humans into existence for the sake of friendship.”² While we long for connection, God does not need us but “desires us into existence.” Friendship is central to our relationship with God and is the basic building block of the Church (John 15:14-15). We are not the Church without meaningful and lasting friendships.

¹ Adapted with permission from Edwards, *Becoming Church*.

² William A. Barry, *A Friendship like No Other Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), xiv.

Current Situation: As we mentioned previously, we are somehow both more connected and disconnected, or isolated, than ever.

- What is the situation now regarding your relationships? What has been your experience?
- Are you good at forming relationships? Are friendships difficult for you? Why/why not?

How It Could Be: Perhaps we can use the tools of connection available to us to become more connected and to help people feel less isolated as we intentionally form relationships.

- What should relationships be like? What would be ideal? How would you like to see it?
- How can you become a better friend? In what ways can you learn to form more meaningful and lasting relationships?

It's worth noting again that listening continues into the other stages in the Fresh Expressions Journey, and the whole things is undergirded by prayer, which is part of our relationships with God. As we listen, we begin to form relationships with people outside the Church through shared spaces and interests.

Since the best listening happens in the context of friendships, these are new friends you are inviting into newly forming Fresh Expression communities. Unlike many traditional forms of church that rely on buildings and marketing, a Fresh Expressions lives and dies by the quality and mutuality of the friendships that we form.

Solutions: We can continue to build listening and form relationships building skills.

- In what ways can we form meaningful and lasting relationships?
- How do we develop new friendships? How do we love and serve in relationships?

Jesus gives us a framework in Luke 10 for spreading the kingdom through friendships. As he sends out his disciples, he instructs them to eat and drink with those who welcome them and then to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them..."

Someone who "promotes peace" resonates with your message and vision and welcomes you into their social circles, giving you the opportunity to share your life and, eventually, your faith with them and the friends in their circle that are interested.

There is freedom in this kind of mission because there is no need to try to coerce people. All you are called to do is be on the lookout for people who are open and that you get along with. If someone wants to be your friend, they see something good in you, and that goodness is Christ.

Mike Breen says, "No amount of coercion on our part can make someone become a Person of Peace. This is the job of the Holy Spirit: he alone can prepare a heart to hear the Gospel. Our job is to have our spiritual eyes open, looking for a Person of Peace to

cross our paths.”³ We are not so much bringing Christ with us as helping people discover the Christ that is already there.

- What are your thoughts on this concept of a Person of Peace?
- In what ways would finding a Person of Peace be helpful in forming new relationships?
- In what ways is it important to be up front and honest with people but also not coercive and manipulative?

Practice: Building Meaningful and Lasting Relationships (see/work through attached handouts).

Before even giving participants the handout, help them to (a) memorize the stack of objects as a mnemonic device, and (b) then memorize what the objects mean. Next, have them (1) practice what they've memorized as a group, (2) then in pairs, and (3) then as a whole group again.

Next, have them practice in pairs short two minute conversations based on the conversational areas. Invite them to pick partners based on who in the room they know the least. One partner gets two minutes, and the other gets two minutes. Demonstrate with a group volunteer first. Have them switch partners and find the person they know the second least, and do it again.

Only after all of this learning and practicing, give participants handouts and have them fill in the blanks. After teaching about conversation expanders, if time permits, have them try them out with one more partner, the one they know the third least. If possible, allow three minutes each for these expanded conversations, i.e. “Where in town do you live?” can be expanded to “How long have you lived there?” “What’s your favorite thing about living here?” etc.

If you want further practice, get out there and meet new people! Try some of these principles. We form friendships with others when we go where they are. If you spend all of your time in the church, all of your friends will be members of your church. That has to change to start a Fresh Expression. Here are some ideas:

Become a Regular: As you listen and begin to identify shared community spaces, if one stood out to you, start going there regularly to have conversations with others.

Be a Good Neighbor: Bake cookies to share or host a block party. Find a way to meet neighbors.

Make Digital Connections: Going where people are includes where many spend a lot of time: online. In the digital age, we have incredible social tools at our fingertips. The trick is to use them in a way that doesn’t eclipse IRL (In Real Life, for the non-tech geeks!) friendships.

³ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did* (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2017), 116.

Gather at the Table: During his earthly ministry, Jesus could often be found at a table. Gathering around a meal was central to his mission and ministry as it could be to ours.

Be a Good Guest: Jesus always accepted invitations to a good party. What public events can you attend? Where can you be a guest?

Participate in Mutual Acts of Service: This is not charity, it's just neighborly service. Do something nice for your neighbor, and, when you need help, ask your neighbor. This is why Luke Edwards prefers "forming relationships" to the one-sided-feeling of "loving and serving."

Report: What were these learning experiences like for you?

- In what ways was the practice of building meaningful and lasting relationships meaningful or helpful for you?
- How are these suggestions for forming relationships helpful? What would you add?
- Based on what you've learned or the skills you're developing, what will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently?

Summarize: Our desired result is to form relationships by launching a Fresh Expression as a simple way to love and serve the people we are listening to and God is calling us to be with.

We agreed that meaningful and lasting relationships begin to form when we reveal ourselves to others and they reveal themselves to us.

Reflect: What was the most important idea or concept for you? What will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently based on our learning?

Application: Savor the relationships you form, and don't use your new friends to form a preconceived program. Especially don't offer them a bait and switch or stop having a relationship with them if they're not interested in Jesus at first. Love them until they ask you why. There may come a time when you will get to share your faith with friends because they ask.

There may also be a time when you can invite them into the Fresh Expression that you are forming (or they might invite themselves). They might even create a Fresh Expression with you.

Again, that time may never come, and that is okay. The people you meet may simply be new friends to enjoy. The relationship *is* the thing, not some other third thing. There are no strings attached. Be open to possibilities and allow the Holy Spirit to work through new friendships.

APPENDIX I
MAKING CONNECTIONS WORKSHEET

Making Connections: Principles for Forming Relationships¹

Meaningful and lasting relationships are formed when we reveal ourselves to others or they reveal themselves to us.

How do we get them to reveal themselves?

1. Listen with interest.

- a. L – LOOK AT THEM.
- b. V – VISUAL APPROVAL.
- c. V – VERBAL APPROVAL.

2. Build your conversations around conversation areas.

Object	Objective
<u>Name Plate</u>	<u>Name?</u>
<u>House</u>	<u>Where do you live?</u>
<u>Group of People</u>	<u>Family?</u>
<u>Work Glove</u>	<u>Work, school, spend time?</u>
<u>Airplane</u>	<u>Travel?</u>
<u>Tennis Racket</u>	<u>Sports, hobbies, interests?</u>
<u>Light Bulb</u>	<u>Ideas?</u>
<u>PFC Soldier</u>	<u>Problem, frustration, concern?</u>
<u>Goal Post</u>	<u>Goals, dreams?</u>

3. Use conversation expanders.

Who What When Where Why How

¹ Adapted with permission from TENTMAKERS, <https://www.tentm.org/>.

APPENDIX J
BUILDING COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Building Community Workshop¹

Subject: When I was a pastor in Arkansas a youth mission called Ozark Mission Project changed the name of adult and youth “campers” to “community builders” in an effort to better describe the community building that was happening during OMP summer camps as they built wheelchair ramps, painted houses, and did other projects for neighbors in the communities they served.

We build community in the process of loving and serving those we’ve been listening to and forming relationships with. The third stage in the FX Journey, and the name of this workshop, is “Building Community.”

Desired Result: To build community through launching a Fresh Expression as a simple way to love and serve those God is calling us to listen to and to form relationships with.

Definition: Fresh Expressions continue by building loving community

- How would you explain what it means to build loving community?
- In what ways do you think changing the name of “campers” at a mission camp to “community builders” will effect Ozark Mission Project participants—young and old?
- What does community building look like?

Let’s agree that building community means constantly looking for ways to create meaningful social connections. While we form relationships with individuals, community forms in groups.

Felt Need: People were not meant to live alone but in community.

- Why is community so important? How does building community help us to better love and serve those we have been listening to and forming relationships with?
- Describe a meaningful community building experience you have had. In what ways was it meaningful to you?

While we are now more connected digitally, Americans are also experiencing loneliness more than ever. Loneliness is a result of too few meaningful and lasting relationships and social interactions.

Current Situation: Just as people long for meaningful and lasting relationships with individuals, they also desire a place and a group or community with whom to belong.

- What is the situation regarding your community connections now? What group(s) or community (communities) do you belong to? What has been your experience?
- Are you good at building community or is it difficult for you? Why/why not?

How It Could Be: Followers of Christ should follow Jesus in making meaningful social connections and community

¹ Adapted with permission from Edwards, *Becoming Church*.

- What should building community be like? What is ideal? How would you like to see it?
- How can you become a community builder? In what ways can you learn to better build community?

Jesus was constantly creating meaningful social connections. Community kept growing around him as the excluded found a place to belong. The Church used to know how to create meaningful social interactions too. We knew how to throw a party! Rodney Stark describes the early church,

Christianity revitalized Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent problems... To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity.²

Building community used to be the best play in the Church's playbook. We somehow lost our outward focus and shifted our time and energy to keeping people already in the Church happy and busy. While the Church exists primarily for those who are not already a part of it, we have lost our missional edge and become too inward focused.

Solutions: We can reclaim our missional edge and learn to build loving community again.

- In what ways can we build loving community?
- How does forming relationships connect to building community?

Before You Launch a Fresh Expression...

Who will you bring together? Reflect on those you have met and the friendships formed.

- With whom did you feel a deep connection?
- With which group of people might the Holy Spirit be calling you to form community?

Why are you gathering? Maybe you are gathering to offer support to single mothers or to create a safe place for people in mourning to process their grief. The community's purpose should be developed with the people you are gathering. Work on it together.

- What simple ways are you loving and serving those you are building community with?

How will you gather? Many Fresh Expressions gather around a common interest. Of those most hungry for community, and among those you've made connections with...

- What kind of gathering would they come to? When, where, for how long will you gather?

² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (New York: Harper One, 1997), 161.

- A walk or jog? A meal? A conversation over coffee? Lawn chairs at the dog park? Include your people in the planning and implementation. Share leadership and ownership.

How often will you gather? There are two types of gatherings that are important to building a community: one-time events and regular gatherings.

- (1) One-time events increase the number of people in your Fresh Expression's social circle and help you to form valuable community partnerships.
- (2) Regular gatherings are where one-on-one friendships slowly become a community. They can be monthly or weekly but must be consistent. Experiment with your gathering, and see what works and what doesn't.

Shaping Your Gathering...

Make it participatory! Create participation and engaging dialogue among the group. Rotate leadership responsibility every week. Assign roles to group members based on their gifts. The more evenly responsibilities are spread across the group, the healthier your Fresh Expression.

Make it fun! Forming a community with people outside the Church should provide laughter and fun. Church folks can forget that the foundation of our faith is rooted in joy. If we're not having fun, I'm convinced we're being the Church wrong. Not only does Jesus throw a good party, he brings the good wine and makes more if it runs out! Joy and laughter draw people together.

How will you get people to show up? Invite people you've already formed a relationship with. Marketing is of little importance to a Fresh Expression, because you're building a community with friends that you have met earlier in the journey. Word of mouth is your best marketing.

How will you get people to come back? The authors of *Get Together* highlight an important lesson, "Regardless of what drives people to show up for the first time, the relationships they form are what will bring them back. Meaningful human connections are sticky."³

Create a group ritual? You can help shape group identity by establishing rituals. Try to establish a beginning ritual and an ending ritual for the gathering. Many Fresh Expression gatherings begin with "highs and lows," where everyone shares the best moment of their week and the most challenging moment. End the gathering with intentionality too.

Practice: Review our community building with the introduction of the Messy Church Model.

- How was the experience of Messy Church meaningful or helpful for you?

³ Bailey Richardson, Kevin Huynh, and Kai Elmer Sotto, *Get Together: How to Build a Community with Your People* (San Francisco: Stripe Press, 2019), 31.

- How did it help us build community? How can Messy Church be used to build community with others?
- Based on what you've learned or the skills you're developing, what will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently?

Report: What were these learning experiences like for you?

- What's one highlight for you from the "Before Your Gathering" concepts?
- What's one highlight for you from the "Shaping Your Gathering" concepts?

Summarize: Our desired result is to build community through launching a Fresh Expression as a simple way to love and serve those God is calling us to listen to and to form relationships with.

We agreed that building community means constantly looking for ways to create meaningful social connections. While we form relationships with individuals, community forms in groups.

Reflect: What was the most important idea or concept for you? What will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently based on our learning?

Focused Journaling Prompt: In your journal, describe how you form relationships and build community with persons from different age groups than yourself. What was it like for you to learn about "Forming Relationships" and "Building Community" with persons from different age groups than yourself?

Application: Forming community is not something we do so that we can have a church later. Forming community is what the Church is called to do. The Book of Common Prayer says, "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."

In other words, the Church can be understood as a community of people who have invited Christ into that community. As you invite others into community, invite Christ into that community.

Focused Group Discussion: In what ways are we forming relationships and building community with persons of all ages in our church and community?

In what ways can we better form relationships and build relationships with persons of all ages in our church or community?

In what ways are forming relationships and building relationships with persons of all ages challenging?

APPENDIX K
EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP WORKSHOP

Exploring Discipleship Workshop¹

Subject: The fourth stage in the FX Journey, and the title of this workshop, is “Exploring Discipleship.” I know what might be thinking, “We’re just now getting to discipleship?” For those we are listening to and building relationships and community with, yes. For those of us who are already followers of Christ, discipleship is all over the FX Journey.

(1) Listening to understand God is about loving God as we follow Jesus and involves prayer and Bible reading and study. Listening to understand others is about loving our neighbor more fully. (2) Forming relationships by discovering a simple way to love and serve others and (3) building community is part of our missional formation. Discipleship is implied in the entire FX Journey.

Desired Result: To find natural ways to Explore Discipleship with those people God is calling us to listen to as we form relationships and build community with them.

Definition: Fresh Expressions continue by exploring discipleship with those who are interested.

- How would you define ‘discipleship’? What does a disciple look like?
- What does it mean to be a disciple or to explore discipleship?

The Greek word for ‘disciple,’ *mathetes*, translates as learner. To become a disciple of Jesus is to become a learner of Jesus. This means coming to know, love, and follow Jesus in the way that he lives. Let’s agree that a disciple is a learner who knows, loves, and follows Jesus, and helps others to do the same.

Felt Need: We are all disciples of someone or something, most of which will leave us empty and longing for something more.

- Why is discipleship so important? Why is following Jesus so important?
- In what ways is following Jesus different from the other things people follow?
- When do you most feel like a disciple of Jesus Christ? Or describe a time when you most felt like a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus says, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” or have it to the full (John 10:10). To become a disciple of Jesus is to live a fuller life.

Current Situation: Just as people long for meaningful and lasting relationships as well as loving community, they long for a fuller life that can only be found as a disciple of Jesus.

- What is the situation now regarding discipleship? What has been your experience?
- Are you growing as a disciple? Staying the same? Drifting backwards?
- If part of being a disciple is making disciples, who are you discipling?

¹ Adapted with permission from Edwards, *Becoming Church*.

Recall that people in the United States are increasingly spiritual and decreasingly religious. Around 60% of the population will never be reached by traditional forms of church, and existing discipleship programs are primarily for those already connected to a church. This is not effective for making disciples (who make disciples) for the transformation of the world.

How It Could Be: Disciples of Jesus must grow in their own faith, and they can and should develop skills for helping others explore discipleship and Jesus' message.

- What should discipleship be like? What is ideal? How would you like to see it?
- How can you help others explore Jesus and discipleship?
- In what ways can you move beyond being a disciple for your own spiritual growth to helping others grow spiritually?

Solutions: There are two approaches to discipleship: formal and informal. Formal discipleship is learning the ways of Jesus from reading Scripture, listening to others, and taking part in planned discussion. In Fresh Expressions, formal discipleship is almost always conversational. Those who are interested gather to discuss a passage of Scripture or a specific part of following Jesus. Leaders ask open-ended questions, encouraging learners to share ideas and experiences.

Informal discipleship is the learning that happens in everyday life alongside a trusted mentor. Whether it is resolving an argument or processing a traumatic event together, every experience is an opportunity to learn how to follow Jesus. In Fresh Expressions, informal discipleship happens all the time as you teach others how to follow Jesus by your words and actions. No pressure!

- In what ways can we explore discipleship and help others to do the same?
- How do we develop skills to grow as disciples? To help others grow as disciples?

Opt-In Discipleship

Discipleship starts with invitation—opting in. For it to be any other way would be manipulative. Jesus let the rich young ruler walk away and told his disciples to “shake the dust off your feet” in response to rejection. Respect the word “no.” As you build community, prayerfully wait for opportunities to invite people in your Fresh Expression into discipleship. Look for those who are ready, and when you have identified them, here are a few ways to offer opt-in discipleship.

Have a set time of transitioning from fellowship to discipleship: Dinner Churches often begin with a meal, and at a set time, they transition to a time of discipleship. Some place a small sign on the tables to invite people to stay after the meal to hear a Jesus story and prayer for everyone who is present. This gives an opportunity for those who are not interested to slip out.

Move from one space to another: A church in Candler, NC hosts a flea market every Saturday morning. While the flea market is happening, they host a short optional Breakfast Church in the fellowship hall. Note the power of offering food, and the connection to gathering around meals.

One-on-one transition: Perhaps only one person in the group is ready to begin a discipleship journey. Start meeting with them for coffee or lunch and see what happens. You may eventually be able to invite more people if interest grows, becoming an offshoot Fresh Expression.

Start an additional gathering: “Sorted” is a Fresh Expression with dinner on Friday evenings for at risk youth who enjoy skateboarding. On Wednesday they invite youth to come back to discuss a Jesus story and skate some more. While Fridays might have 100 youth, Wednesdays only have 20, but it is 20 youth with no other church connection, beginning to walk with Christ.

This strategy leaves the original gathering unchanged. By not messing with the social gathering, you leave the front door of your Fresh Expression wide open for new people to enter.

Full group transition: Sometimes the whole group is interested and willing to introduce an element of discipleship. If this is the path you take, be sure to host occasional social gatherings where new folks can be invited.

Spiritual from the start: Some Fresh Expressions, like the Messy Church we will launch, have a spiritual element from the start. As the community forms, people are invited to explore spirituality and faith together. Messy Church *is* church already, just not like we’re used to.

An existing ministry becomes a Fresh Expression: Your church might already have a ministry that can very easily become a Fresh Expression. A feeding ministry that has built relationships with community members could become a Dinner Church. A youth soccer league could spin off a Fresh Expression. There might be low hanging fruit in your church!

- In what ways might Messy Church be a way to connect with families and individuals?
- In what ways might we launch another Fresh Expression, like Dinner Church in connection with one of our other missions or ministries?

Practice: Jesus Story

All too often we overcomplicate discipleship. We think that we have to be some sort of expert Jesus follower in order to help others learn to know, love, and follow Jesus. We’re all really pilgrims on the journey, as Luke Edwards puts it, and we’re learning and growing together. A “Jesus story” is a simple way for us to do this. Let’s practice.

Have someone read Luke 10:1-9. Ask someone else to put in in their own words or give a modern day retelling. Note that in a Dinner Church setting, or another Fresh Expression, someone is often assigned this role and is able to prepare in advance. You don’t need a sermon to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ! Ask the following questions about the story:

- What does this Jesus Story teach us about God?
- What does this Jesus Story teach us about ourselves?

- What is one thing I will start doing, stop doing, or do differently, based on this story?

Again, note how simple this is. We can actually use this in our own Bible reading and study. These are questions we can ask about almost any passage of Scripture whether we're a novice Bible student or have been reading and studying it for years.

A Discipleship Pathway

To guide someone along the discipleship journey, it's helpful to have a map. This is often called a discipleship pathway, a series of programs or resources available to church members to help them mark progress in discipleship. The problem is that most discipleship pathways start (and finish) with someone showing up on Sunday morning and being assimilated into church life.

While this may lead to discipleship for some, it's mostly the 40% that already attend church or would consider it. Remember that 60% of our neighbors are not coming to us in the church at all. We need a pathway that starts before Sunday morning, and one option is the FX Journey itself.

As we consider inviting friends into this sacred journey, it's helpful to have this pathway in mind. If we can identify where they are in the journey, we will know how to walk alongside them in their pilgrimage. Again, instead of looking at friends as Christians or non-Christians, it's far more helpful to view all of us as pilgrims on the journey.

Report: What were these learning experiences like for you?

- What's one highlight for you from creating opt-in discipleship options?
- What's one highlight for you from practicing the Jesus Story discussion model?
- Why is it important to have a discipleship pathway? What's one highlight for you?

Summarize: Our desired result is to find natural ways to explore discipleship with those people God is calling us to listen to as we form relationships and build community with them.

We agreed that a disciple is a learner who knows, loves, and follows Jesus, and helps others to do the same.

Reflect: What was the most important idea or concept for you? What will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently based on our learning?

Application: Knowing how gradual this journey can be, it's easy to see how ineffective inviting pilgrims who are not yet Christians to Sunday morning worship actually is at bringing people into the faith. It is too big a jump for most. In our post-Christian age, people need time to test the waters, to pursue faith at their own paces, without pressure or strings attached.

Not only do we need forms of church and a willingness to go where our post-Christian friends spend their time, we need forms of church and a willingness to travel this slow path alongside them. Fresh Expressions are designed to be this kind of community.

APPENDIX L
CHURCH TAKING SHAPE WORKSHOP

Church Taking Shape Workshop¹

Subject: The fifth stage in the FX Journey, and the title of this workshop, is “Church Taking Shape” as a new Christian community forms.

Desired Result: To form a new Christian community with church-like character with the people God is calling us to listen to, form relationship, build community, and explore discipleship with.

Definition: Fresh Expressions continue by forming new Christian community with church-like character.

- What is Church? How would you define ‘Christian community’?
- What does it mean to be Church or to be a Christian community?

Our understanding of Church impacts how we form Fresh Expressions. The problem is that we have not spent much time reflecting on the simple but important question: “What is Church?”

Far too often our definition of Church has more to do with the rituals and less to do with their underlying meaning. Church is also not bricks and the mortar—not a building but a people.

What makes something church? Let us agree that the Church is the people God loves gathered around Christ in Christian community to love the people God loves. Jesus tells us that he is present where two or three gather in his name (Matthew 18:20). When we gather around Jesus, we are the Church.

Felt Need: Interestingly, the context of this often quoted passage about what the Church is, is what to do when people in the Church are in conflict. We long for forgiveness and reconciliation.

- Why is Church or Christian community so important?
- Why make this connection with forgiveness and reconciliation?

Current Situation: Just as people long for meaningful and lasting relationships, loving community, and the fuller life Christ offers, they long for the intimacy and influence they can have by being the Church—God’s very incarnational presence in the world.

- What is the situation now regarding the Church? What has been your experience?
- If the Church is a people, not a building, how would you describe your current state of being the Church in the world and in your context?

How It Could Be: We can better represent Christ in the world as his Church, especially with those who have baggage surrounding organized religion and the established Church.

- What do we need to have Church or Christian community?
- What would it look like to trim Church down to just the essentials? What is absolutely necessary for it to be called ‘church’?

¹ Adapted with permission from Edwards, *Becoming Church*.

- More importantly, what does it mean to *be* the Church in the world?

Rowan Williams says,

If ‘church’ is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening the encounter in their encounter with each other, there is plenty of theological room for diversity or rhythm and style, so long as we have ways of identifying the same living Christ at the heart of every expression of Christian life in common.²

Solutions: When you launch a Fresh Expression, you have the opportunity to create church in its simplest form.

- What do you need to call a Fresh Expression ‘church’?
- What can you leave off and still have Church or Christian community?

Marks of the Church...

Throughout Church history, the basic elements have been: word, sacrament, worship, fellowship, and mission. For the past 2,000 years, the Church has never stopped adapting these elements.

Proclaiming the Word: The center of the Church’s calling is the proclamation of the Word. This has taken many forms in Church history. There are other ways to proclaim the Word of God than boring lectures (a product of the Enlightenment). Forms like conversational preaching can capture and keep the attention of those exploring and growing in the Christian faith.

Sacraments: Consult with your pastor or denominational leadership when celebrating sacraments in your Fresh Expression. Many traditions require a clergyperson to lead them. For lay-led Fresh Expressions, this may be as simple as inviting the pastor of your anchor church for Communion.

Most Protestant traditions celebrate two sacraments: Baptism and Communion. In the mystery of Baptism, we are spiritually reborn into the Church community. In the mystery of Communion, we receive grace, and experience sanctification, thanksgiving, remembrance, and fellowship.

Edification of Believers: An essential part of the Church is spiritual care for its members. This includes discipleship resources for those in your Fresh Expressions as well as pastoral care. It’s important to have small groups where discipleship can occur as your Fresh Expression grows.

Pastoral care looks very different in a Fresh Expression, and by pastor, we don’t just mean clergy. You might have gifts as a pastor and meet up for a cup of coffee when someone is facing a difficult situation or decision. Share the load of pastoral care with others in the group who are gifted in this area. It’s not about giving the best advice, it’s often about being the best listener.

² Graham Cray, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions in a Changing Context* (New York: Seabury Books, 2010), vii.

Worship: Unfortunately, the Church of the last 40 years has fused the language of worship and music. Equating worship to singing has created a limited understanding of the rich vision of Christian worship, and it stifles our missional potential.

It takes time for new Christians to be able to sing the words we treasure so much in our hymns and worship songs. Imagine singing a love song on your first date. Awkward!

Every moment of a church gathering, from prayer, to the reading of God's word, to proclamation, to participating in Holy Communion, is worship. Music certainly has great potential to be a way to worship, but so does communal reading, sharing a testimony, or prayer.

In Fresh Expressions, the first step is to incorporate missional worship—a taste of worship for seekers. As the Fresh Expression matures, you can gradually shift into fuller forms of worship.

- How will you incorporate these elements in your Fresh Expression of church?
- What considerations need to be made regarding celebrating the sacraments?

Practice: Lectio Divina – Latin for “divine reading.”

Let's try, as an act of worship, an ancient practice that helps us to slow down, listen, and pray, looking for God to reveal God's self through God's Word. The goal is to become aware of God's presence and release all expectations. Clear your mind before you begin reading or listening.

Take some deep breaths and pray, inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to you and help you focus. You may light a candle as a reminder that you are entering a sacred space and time with God.

1. LECTIO – Select a passage (Luke 10:1-9) to read slowly several times, once to get oriented and then two more times, noticing something—a word or phrase—that seems to stand out for some reason.
2. MEDITATIO – Reflect: What word or phrase stands out? What from this passage speaks to you directly? Repeat the word or phrase several times allowing the rest to fall away.
3. ORATIO – Open your palms as you pray. Let God know your heart, mind, and soul are open to hearing from God now. Offer prayers of gratitude and petition as they arise.
4. CONTEMPLATIO – Listen for God to speak or give guidance. Repeat your word or phrase if your mind wanders; refocus by praying and asking God to help you sense God is near.

Prayer: William Barry's definition of prayer is, “Prayer is a conscious, personal relationship with God.” To be conscious of God is to be aware of God's presence and to respond to that presence. In a Fresh Expression, prayer takes many forms, including contemplative practices like Lectio Divina. Contemplative practices like these could be utilized in Fresh Expressions.

Many Fresh Expressions open or close with a time of prayer requests and prayer. People that are new to the faith are open to sharing prayer requests long before they are comfortable praying themselves. Keeping our definition in mind though, you might also find that people new to the faith have been praying long before they knew what to call it. Think about your context and where each individual is on their journey, and help move them forward in their prayer life.

Justice and Mission: As your Fresh Expression has taken shape, you have built relationships with people in the community, and they have taken leadership roles. Your group may identify an injustice that it wishes to address as a response to careful listening to the community.

Giving: In Fresh Expressions, we meet people where they are and help them grow from there. Most people will not be ready to give to a church for a long time because of distrust in the Church regarding money. It's not worth the risk of introducing an offering too soon.

If we reflect on the meaning behind giving, we find that it's about recognizing that all is a gift from God, and we should give back a portion of that gift to God. One way to do this is through inviting generosity for people on the margins.

Report: What were these learning experiences like for you?

- What's one highlight for you from marks of the Church?
- What's one highlight for you from practicing the contemplative practice Lectio Divina?

Summarize: Our desired result is to form a new Christian community with church-like character with the people God is calling us to listen to, form relationship, build community, and explore discipleship with.

We agreed that the Church is the people God loves gathered around Christ in Christian community to love the people God loves.

Reflect: What was the most important idea or concept for you? What will you start doing, stop doing, or do differently based on our learning?

Focused Journaling Prompt: In your journal, answer the following questions. What was it like for you to plan a Messy Church gathering, Dinner Church gathering, or another Fresh Expression with persons from different age groups than yourself?

In your journal, describe how you explore discipleship and being the Church with persons from different age groups than yourself. What was it like for you to learn about "Exploring Discipleship" and "Being the Church" with persons from different age groups than yourself?

Application: We have wrestled with questions like, "What do we need to have church?" and "What does it mean to *be* Church?" We have found creative and contextual ways to live this out.

When the essential elements of Church are incorporated regularly, the Fresh Expression becomes a mature expression of Church. This doesn't mean it will cease to be fresh or begin to look like traditional forms of Church. It will likely still appear different to those accustomed to a certain way of being Church. Don't let anyone convince you that your church is less-than or church-lite.

Celebrate! You are also ready to help others take this journey. As you step into the "last" circle, it's really a new beginning as you share what you learned and help others to "Do It Again." The FX Journey and the journey of discipleship is a mission and ministry of multiplication.

Focused Group Discussion: In what ways would our community benefit from Fresh Expressions like Messy Church or Dinner Church?

In what ways can Fresh Expressions like Messy Church and Dinner Church help us to be more intentionally intergenerational?

What are your concerns with launching a Fresh Expression like Messy Church or Dinner Church?

In what ways can we come alongside persons of all ages for intentional discipleship?

In what ways can we form Fresh Expressions of Church, or a new Christian community, with persons of all ages in mind?

In what ways is coming alongside persons of all ages for intentional discipleship challenging?

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